Perceptions of power and their effect on organisational behaviour in conditions of ambiguity.

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PERCEPTIONS OF POWER AND THEIR EFFECT

ON ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR IN CONDITIONS OF AMBIGUITY

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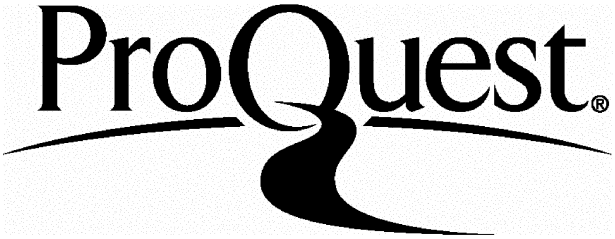

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SUMMARY

The thesis starts with a discussion of the methodological issues involved in researching perceptions of power, a description of the pilot project and its findings, and a discussion of the rationale for the qualitative methodology based on a decision-making process, which was chosen for the main field study. A review of the existing literature of power is then provided, in which the main themes and conflicts of view across a broad range of theoretical perspectives are identified. A descriptive analysis of the field research follows, from which inferences are drawn and links made to existing theory. The pervasive ambiguity of organisational phenomena as revealed by this analysis is then further analysed. A classification of different types of organisational ambiguity, the ways in which it can arise in the organisation and the responses people can make to it are suggested, its political significance being a major consideration. Finally, some suggestions for further lines of enquiry are presented.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 of this thesis discusses the methodology used in carrying out this research, the reasons for the choice of method and a number of issues raised by its use. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature of power, carried out in preparation for the field research, and identifies a number of themes and conflicts of view. The descriptive analysis of the field research is provided in Chapter 3, and links are made in this chapter to the theory in Chapter 2. A major theme to emerge from the anlaysis is also identified in Chapter 3 and forms the basis for the development of theory about political behaviour which is discussed in Chapter 4. The conclusion to the thesis identifies a number of ideas of particular interest which emerged from the research and suggests some directions for further enquiry.

CHAPTER 1

METHODOLOGY

1. Research objectives

The idea for doing this research developed from my observations of the power structure and political behaviour in an industrial organisation, which raised questions about how participants perceive organisational power, if indeed they perceive it at all. The objectives of this research project were therefore to investigate and throw some light on the political perceptions of organisation members and the consequences of these perceptions for people's behaviour in the organisation.

2. Preparation for the field study

(a) Clarifying the concept of power. Researching people's perceptions of power raises the question of operationalising the concept "power" - what was I going to take to be a political perception? What a social scientist might call "organisational politics" might not necessarily be recognised as such by organisation members. On the other hand, I did not want to narrow the study down to a linguistic question of what people mean by the word "power", since this might produce philosophical reflections on the concept which bore little relationship to people's perceptions and actions in organisational situations. I therefore decided to collect data both about people's perceptions of phenomena which could be classified as "political", even if they themselves would not use the word, and also about the sorts of phenomena to which people in the organisation would apply the word "political".

In order to clarify the concept of power in my own mind, before starting the fieldwork I carried out a review of the literature on

organisational politics (see Chapter 2).

Schwartz and Jacobs (1979) in discussing whether or not one should use existing concepts when approaching field work, or, as some have argued, avoid reading the literature in order to avoid researching with pre-conceived ideas about what one will find, point out that there is a middle ground (as advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967)) in which existing concepts can have a sensitising function but are not regarded as sacrosanct - they can be abandoned if the research suggests they should be. My use of theories of power as a preparation for field work has been in this sensitising vein. I agree with McClintock et al (1979) that it is impossible to start fieldwork without any theory at all, and it follows from this that a decision must be made as to whether the theories you do have at the start (perhaps not even explicitly) are to suffice. I decided that the more ideas I had about what might constitute "political" behaviour and the problems and nuances involved in the concept of power, the better able I would be to recognise political processes in the field, and therefore make the most of a research opportunity which was limited by time and other constraints. An alternative strategy of just taking one theory of politics - strategic contingency theory for example - would not have been appropriate, since I was more interested in finding out about organisation members' political perceptions and actions than in whether an existing theory in the literature could be supported.

Other social science concepts, such as "norms", "values" and "structures" have been used where they have seemed helpful, both in identifying the main strands in existing theory and in analysing the field work data. Some phenomena have therefore been "taken for granted" in these respects.

As further preparation for the study I attended some seminars and an ATM Workshop* on research methodology and read some of the literature relevant to qualitative research methods, such as Bogdan and Taylor (1975), Glaser and Strauss (1967), Blumer (1969), Berger and Luckman (1966), Jehenson (1973), Kelly (1963), Wann (1964), Husserl (1965), Jung (1968). Some of these authors were dealing directly with research methods, while others were writing more generally about the problem of knowledge and about differing perceptions of the human being. Although a great deal of such reading, both in research methods and about organisational politics, was completed before the main field study began, it did not stop altogether at that point, but continued to the end of the project.

In discussion with my research supervisor it was agreed that the next step would be to start the field work by carrying out a pilot project, using as a focus a particular decision-making process and this will be discussed in the next section.

(b) The pilot project. The pilot project was undertaken with two objectives:-

1. To clarify the methodological issues involved in researching perceptions of power and

2. to provide a sharper focus on the research area.

*Association of Teachers of Management. A Workshop lead by John Burgoyne of Lancaster University.

In order to avoid using a narrow definition of the concept of power and thereby pre-empting informants' perceptions (by asking them questions about "authority" for example) it was necessary to find some focus of attention for data collection which did not consist of power concepts themselves, but would nevertheless elicit perceptions of a political nature. Decision-making processes were chosen for this purpose.

The pilot study was carried out in an academic setting and took as it's focal point a decision made by the institution about how to allocate space in a newly-acquired building between academic departments, several of which had serious accommodation problems. It soon became clear, however, that there were two main foci - the decision by the local authority to purchase the building in the first place being bound up with the decision about how to use it once acquired.

In this project I was trying to find out something about people's perceptions of power in situations in which they were themselves involved. By focussing on these particular decisions about accommodation I expected to be able to learn something of their perceptions of power through their explanations of the decision-making process - for example, who influenced the decision, who made the decision, whether they themselves had influenced it and what means of influence had been used. I expected that people would differ in their perceptions of the decision-making process as being "political" and in their own ability to influence the decisions.

Since organisation members might find it threatening to discuss these political issues, I thought it best to collect data in a way which would cause least alarm. An interviewing method seemed most useful for the purpose, since it would allow me, apart from obtaining data about the decision-making processes, to guage interviewee's reactions to the project and respond to any misgivings they might reveal. After the pilot study, research methods were given further consideration and therefore will be discussed again later in this chapter. Suffice it to say here that in the pilot project data were collected mainly by relatively unstructured interviews, nine people being interviewed for about one hour each. The sample included the head of the institution, senior administrative staff, heads of the academic departments concerned and some lecturers who were also directly involved. In these interviews, people were simply asked to say what had happened in the decision-making process as they saw it, this process having taken place over the previous two years. Occasionally power-related questions were asked, such as "how did you go about persuading X to do that?" Notes were not taken during the interviews (as an experiment) but were written up immediately afterwards. In addition to the interviews, minutes of relevant committees were consulted.

The main findings of the pilot project will be recounted here. They represent my interpretation at the time of the data which I had collected about my informants' perceptions of political processes (whether or not they would themselves have labelled such processes as "political"). The main findings were:-

1. There was no consensus about who was making the decisions. Informants either identified different individuals as being the decision-maker or said that they did not know who it was - the process was vague. It was also clear from the minutes of relevant committees that the decisions were not being made in formal meetings within the institution.

2. These decisions represented one of those organisational "dramas" to which Pettigrew (1979) refers - major events which stand out from the background of routine. This particular drama had the effect of disrupting routine relationships and norms of behaviour, and made some people feel that their power was being undermined. This was largely because administrators routinely had more to do with the local authority officials than did the academics, the latter being disinclined to be involved in administrative matters if they could avoid it. However, when the academics felt compelled to take part in the drama (because they were afraid of what would happen to their departments if they did not) the routine relationships between administrators and local authority officials were upset by the unorthodox methods of influence used by some academics - for example threatening to organise demonstrations and direct approaches to local authority officials. Doubt was being cast on the administration's ability to deal with the local authority effectively, which threatened a loss of influence for the administrators within the institution. Because of the intervention of the academics, even when the outcome of the drama was favourable to the institution, the administration could not claim credit for it.

3. Some people appeared to cast themselves in politically oriented roles in response to being involved in the drama, and some people were cast in roles by others. Two people, both heads of departments, appeared to cast themselves in roles which I identified as the Knight and the Pawn respectively. Their political perceptions and reported behaviour in relation to the decision-making processes were in sharp contrast. The Knight explained how he had continuously taken initiatives in trying to obtain a favourable outcome for his department: raising the matter at every possible opportunity in committees, looking for alternative space elsewhere in the city, calling meetings of his staff and manipulating these meetings to get the decisions he wanted, threatening to hold demonstrations to bring the matter to public attention, distributing leaflets and holding discussions with possible allies and with people he needed to influence. The Pawn on the other hand presented a picture of himself as at the mercy of the administrators and a picture of the institution as at the mercy of the local authority. As he had not been consulted, he had not taken any initiatives himself and he was critical of people in his own department who were more politically active. He was also critical of the administration for not standing up to the local authority. Using Emerson's (1962) classification one could say that the Pawn's response to the political activities of others was to withdraw from the process, while that of the Knight was to reduce his dependency by extending his power network, forming coalitions and consolidating his department into a group with himself as it's spokesman, thereby enhancing his own status.

4. Some people appeared to be cast in roles which I identified as "the Ogre". Ogres were people seen as especially powerful and dangerous, around whom one must tread warily. They were dangerous, not only because they were powerful but also because they were either antagonistic to one's raison d'etre - for example, they might be perceived as hostile to the inclusion of a particular department within the institution - or because they were seen as capable of acting irrationally, or being devious. Thus a local authority official was seen as an "Ogre" by one of the administrators, who in his turn was seen as an "Ogre" by the Pawn.

5. The decision-making process was not seen as a political process by some people involved, but rather as a rational bureaucratic process. Therefore, their strategy was to go through the formal channels or rely on rational argument to achieve the right solution. If things did not go your way it was because there were issues involved of which you could not be aware or because people misunderstood.

6. The data illustrated the importance of information in the political process. There was, in particular, a fear that information would get into the wrong hands - for example, it was feared that academic staff might pass information about the institution's discussions to their connections in local government since some members of staff were active as local councillors. Information was therefore withheld in order to protect a negotiating position or a relationship with an important third party. However, in some cases this had an adverse effect, since

people began to feel that the administration were not being sufficiently firm in their dealings with the local authority.

7. Behind the manipulation of information referred to above could be seen the impact of the structure of the social system comprising the institution and the local authority. It is relevant to consider the two together as one system, as the boundary between them was not clear-cut, not only because of the formal constitution of the institution but also because, although each was divided into sub-groups based on the division of labour, there were overlapping memberships based largely on allegiances and values. For example, the local authority was divided along the lines of party politics and (not co-terminously) educational ideology, but some of the Institution's staff were active in local government and local party politics, had differing educational ideologies and, moreover, as local residents were constituents of elected representatives in the local authority. One effect of these complex groupings within and between the institution and the local authority was to provide or deny access to information.

8. One finding had more to do with the politics of researching politics than with the decision-making processes themselves. I was not able to gain much data about these processes from one interviewee (one of the rationalists referred to above) because of his reaction to my research methods. He expressed concern that I was not using a prepared set of questions - a questionnaire for example - and at one point in the interview said, "Look here, you're talking to someone who's ..... done

a lot of research and I'm rather concerned about your research methods". In spite of agreeing with me that different people can have different perceptions of the same phenomena, he appeared to find great difficulty in accepting the idea that he had "perceptions" of the decision-making process rather than "facts" about it. His statement, "If you ask a rational person a question they will give you the facts they know" illustrates this difficulty. My impression was that this informant wanted to control the interview within the bounds of some view he held about what a research interview should be like, rather than being in reaction to a perceived threat in being interviewed, since he could very easily have refused the interview. This incident illustrates the constraints which can be placed on research by informants' views of what is an acceptable data collection method. If the informant is powerful in the organisation and objects to the method, this could (although it did not in this case) jeopardise the collection of further data.

The results of this pilot project showed that using a decision as a focal point was a valuable way of collecting data about political perceptions, since in telling their story about what they had done, or not done, and why, interviewees were also drawing the political picture as they saw it. They differed in the degree of complexity of the view they presented of the process of influencing decision-making and in their views of the power structure and these differences seemed consistent with the kinds of actions they took, or with their non-action. Since to some extent they were telling stories about each other, it was possible to find some corroborative evidence for statements they made about their actions.

As far as the method of data collection was concerned, I came to the conclusion that one or two people would have told me less, or even refused to be interviewed, if a tape-recorder had been used but that taking notes during the interview would have been acceptable and would have helped me to keep track of the order in which people gave their information as well as of what they said, although I felt that even so it would be important to write up the interview immediately while it was still fresh in the mind.

This had been a small project, involving a few informants and dealing with a major decision which had already been made and was therefore history. In analysis of the data I was considerably guided by ideas in the literature of organisational politics. The main field research differed from the pilot project in these and other respects and the next section deals with my approach to the main study, including methodological considerations, the methods I used, and the problems encountered in carrying them out.

3. Decisions about methodology

(a) Review of research methods. Having completed the pilot project, I considered whether it would be possible to collect more precise information about people's political perceptions by using alternative methods. So far I had relied almost entirely on relatively unstructured interviews, plus some documentary information, in collecting data. Some documentary information was collected "unobtrusively" in that the papers were available from the library and participants in the decision-making process were not aware that I was collecting data from this source. However, this was background information and the most important data came from the interviews.

Some alternative methods of collecting data about people's perceptions of power would be the use of a questionnaire survey or structured interview, or a projective test such as the TAT and to obtain information about people's behaviour as well as their perceptions, one might devise a laboratory experiment such as that used by Mulder (1977), or carry out some form of participant observation. These will be briefly reviewed, showing why in the event I did not use them:-

Structured questionnaire and interview methods. The advantage of such methods is that all informants are asked the same questions in the same sequence and if "closed" rather than open-ended questions are used, requiring yes or no answers or ticks in boxes, the answers can be easily processed numerically. Moreover, since questionnaires can be sent through the post, it enables you to collect data without having the difficulties of travelling to see your informants and dealing with potentially stressful interviews. The trouble with these structured methods, as Swartz and Jacobs (1979) have pointed out, is that you have to know in advance what questions to ask, and there is an assumption that nothing relevant has been left out of the list of questions. There is also the problem of the acceptability of such methods, particularly when respondents are sophisticated in their use of words and when, as with the Kelly Grid technique, the procedure is time-consuming and potentially tedious.

Studies by Peabody (1962), Kenen and Kenen (1978) and Maddison, Allen, Porter, Renwick and Mayes (1980) illustrate the adverse effects of studying people's perceptions through highly structured methods. In such studies, concepts such as "authority", "formal power" and

"influence" have to be assumed to mean the same things to different people, even though, as can be seen from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and as Maddison et al themselves admit with an irony of which they seem unaware, they do not all mean the same things to different social scientists. It also has to be assumed in these studies that power is a particular type of phenomenon, for example it can occur "more often" or "less often" and that interviewees make similar distinctions between aspects of the social systems within which they hold concepts of power, for example, distinctions between "staff" and "line" roles, or between "educational policy" and "financial policy".

As is shown in Chapter 2, theories about power in the existing literature are very wide ranging and contain considerable areas of disagreement between theorists. One of the problems of adopting a highly structured approach to the study of people's perceptions of power is that, not only does it lead to the squashing of interviewees' feet into social scientists' shoes, but also to a highly selective use of the existing theory to avoid the diversity and complexity, which would undermine the structuring of the research.

One of the criticisms made of the A-B model of power reviewed in Chapter 2, Section 2, is that it ignores the context within which people try to influence each other and there is considerable emphasis in the literature on the importance of that context for the concept of power. For example, structures and cultures are shown to be politically derived and to have implications for political behaviour. It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that people's perceptions of their context will have a bearing on their perceptions of power,

but again, it cannot be assumed that terms such as "structure" or "culture" mean the same things to different members of an organisation, or indeed, mean anything at all to them. A further consideration was that participants in an organisation might have perceptions and adopt behaviour which others, including social scientists, would call "political", but which particular informants would not. Not perceiving power in the organisation on the part of some participants might be important in the political processes and the literature about power discussed in Chapter 2 suggests that lack of awareness or ignorance can be of political significance.

For these various reasons it seemed clear to me that in order to take the perceptions of my informants seriously I could not predetermine what kinds of ideas about power they would have, or what their perceptions would be of the context within which these ideas arose. The use of highly structured methods was therefore rejected as being inappropriate to this study.

Projective Tests - the TAT. One of my informants in the pilot project suggested that I should use this method of collecting data about people's perceptions of power and I duly gave it some thought. However, I could not see any way of devising such a test which would link people's perceptions to an organisational event or situation such as a particular decision-making process. Without such a link I could not be sure that informants' responses had any bearing on their perceptions of organisational politics. For example, if they gave an a-political response, would I be entitled to assume that they were unaware of any political processes in their organisation? Again, there was the question of the possible reactions of people,

as yet unknown to me, to being asked to complete such a test, and because the method seemed to offer few gains and considerable disadvantages, it was rejected.

Laboratory experiments. Like the TAT method, this means of collecting data about people's perceptions of organisational politics has the disadvantage of being remote from the organisational setting, in which people have past experience, ongoing concerns and future prospects. Although, as with the TAT, some things can be learned from the use of laboratory methods, they were not close enough to the things I was interested in. It must also be said that the chances of gathering a sufficient number of busy people to take part in such an experiment for no particular benefit to themselves must be remote. Perhaps people with special interests in social science experiments would have been interested but that would have limited the research sample to an unwarranted extent.

Participant observation. As Swchartz and Jacobs (1979) point out, there are a number of ways in which one can be a participant observer, depending on what role the researcher intends to play and what other people in the research setting think the researcher's role is. Members of the research setting may or may not be aware that there is a researcher in their midst. The difference between participant observation and interviewing is that in the former case the researcher has the opportunity and can legitimately be present at organisational events and can observe interaction between organisation members. This could provide invaluable data for the study of organisational politics, both in providing an opportunity to observe political behaviour and also to hear statements revealing political

perceptions, not necessarily addressed to the interviewer. One could envisage that a researcher into the politics of decision-making could, in a known researcher role, be present at all meetings at which the particular process under observation was to be discussed, and by being around in the social system might also be present at informal exchanges between individuals concerning the decision. Two problems are involved in this: one is gaining access to decision-making meetings, particularly those from which little information is normally made available to organisation members; the other is in being in the right place at the right time to catch the informal exchanges - which might in fact be crucial to the political process. For example, in the present study one would need to be in the professor's office at the precise time when one of his colleagues telephoned him about a forthcoming meeting of the VCAC, as a lobbying tactic (and even then you would only hear one half of the conversation!) How much you could find out by just being around in people's offices would depend to some extent on how closely people worked together and how much their work kept them inside the organisation rather than outside it. The "known researcher" role in participant observation would, however, have the advantage that it would legitimise not only being present in the organisation (provided access was agreed) but also interviewing organisation members about their perceptions.

Taking up a role in the decision-making process itself could have the additional advantage that organisation members might be compelled to interact with you as part of the decision-making process, perhaps in trying to influence you over some issue, which would be additional direct data about their political behaviour. One would also then

have one's own reactions to the decision-making process as data. Taking up a substantive role in this way would present the difficulty of becoming too involved in the process - of maintaining detachment rather than "going native" as Schwartz and Jacobs (1979) have put it. This latter problem applies also to the "unknown researcher" role, particularly if one adopted this role in one's own organisation. Taking up an "unknown researcher" role in someone else's organisation might possibly be done through a secondment - perhaps on some staff development pretext - but if one wanted to study a particular decision-making process, the role would have to be carefully selected to give sufficient access to decision-making arenas, whether formal or informal, and it might be risky to attempt this without some collusion with existing organisation members, in that you might spend your secondment in the "wrong" place. There would also, of course, be the problem of successfully combining the overt and covert roles, which as Schwartz and Jacobs note, could be stressful. Moreover, if organisation members sensed that the researcher was particularly interested in political issues, this could change their attitudes and behaviour towards the researcher in subtle ways. The researcher might, for example, be regarded as "devious" - which would be true, but not for the reason that they imagined. Participant observation as a means of collecting data about people's perceptions of power and their political behaviour has a great deal to recommend it. However, as a part-time research student it does necessitate negotiating a block of time away from one's own organisation in order to have the freedom to participate in the research setting and at the same time negotiating access to an organisation in which participant observation of organisational politics would be most

suitable. Negotiating both these requirements so that they coincide can be a risky business. Among the horror stories which circulate between researchers is the one about the man whose organisation had agreed to his release for six months and had arranged to take on someone to cover his work. He had also obtained access to an organisation, only to find that they backed out at the last minute. Half his research time was then wasted in trying to find an alternative location.

At the beginning of the field study, I was not optimistic of the chances of getting access to study the political processes in an organisation, if only because people might see such an investigation as a threat to their political position. Participant observation is more demanding of organisation members (in that they have less control over the data you obtain) than is interviewing and consequently one can expect access to be more difficult for it. I found in the present study that there was some opposition to my being allowed even to interview people about a relatively uncontentious decision-making process. This opposition was at a high level in two of the major segments of the organisation's formal structure, which meant that they would also have opposed my obtaining access to do observations of the more important decision-making committees in which they would have been involved.

Since I was offered an opportunity to do the main study based on two decision-making processes about the allocation of resources, such decisions being likely to stimulate political behaviour, I decided to start with a low-key interviewing approach and then see what other

opportunities the setting might offer for observation. In the event, I was able to do a small amount of participant observation in that I was able to sit in as an observer on an Area Meeting at which the Research Fund allocation for the Area was being decided. Also I found that from a political point of view I became a participant in the organisation by virtue of my researcher role and the reactions of organisation members to this could be used as data.

(b) The field study methodology. The location of the main study was again an academic setting, and it was both an advantage and a disadvantage that my research supervisor was a member of the organisation. The advantage was that he was able to provide the access to the organisation to do the research, which could have been difficult to obtain elsewhere. The disadvantage was that some people there might see me as an agent rather than a researcher and that some information had to be kept confidential from him.

It was agreed that I should use two relatively minor decision-making processes as the foci of the study - the allocation of money from the university's Research Fund and from the Equipment Fund. Although, as in the pilot study, these were decisions about resource allocation and might therefore be expected to encourage political activity, they differed from the pilot study decision in that they were annually recurring events, not one-off decisions, so that losers could try again next year. This had not been the case in the pilot project decision, which for that reason had been a more heated political process. Another difference was that, in the main study I would be researching the decision-making processes as they were taking place, rather than in retrospect. They would therefore be live

issues, but not, it was hoped, so contentious as to make people unwilling to talk to me about them.

Since I would be researching these decision-making processes while they were taking place, I needed to plan the research to fit into their time schedules. I therefore began with the Research Fund, as this process started first and most of the interviews were conducted on this topic. The Equipment Fund process provided a second opportunity to collect additional data and to make a comparison of the politics of two decision-making processes which were conducted in different ways.

(i) The sample. Fifty-two people were interviewed during the course of the project and this represents approximately 10% of the total staff of the organisation, both administrative and academic. Since the organisation is formally structured into three Areas - Arts, Science and Technology - for the purposes of these decisions, an attempt was made to spread the interviews across these areas in a relatively even distribution. I considered that by this means I might be able to see whether this structure was reflected in differences in people's perceptions.

The break-down of interviews by Area was as follows:-

Arts	= 20	(1 administrative staff)
Science	= 17	(3 " ")
Technology	= 13	(2 " ")

Two administrators were not attached to any Area. On the basis of full-time academic staff members (excluding research officers, demonstrators and research assistants), Science is the largest

Area (146), Arts is the second largest (119) and Technology the smallest (90). (Figures relate to the year 1979-80).

It can be seen from this that the interviews were slightly over-weighted on the Arts side. This was due to there being some resistance in the Science Area to the project, particularly in the early stages and given the constraint of the time schedule of the decisions, as the project progressed I realised that it was necessary to collect data from those who would supply it and not to worry too much about an even spread of interviews. Most of the data relating to the Equipment Fund came from the Science and Technology Areas, since the Arts Area is far less involved in this decision than those Areas.

In the early stages, individuals were selected for interviewing from among names supplied by my research supervisor as being people who would be likely to be prepared to talk to me, and who were likely to have applied to the Research Fund. These included some people in the Science Area. In the Arts Area, Heads of Schools supplied me with names of people who had applied to the Fund and in some cases also indicated who would be willing to be interviewed.

In the Technology Area some individuals were approached via the Area Chairman and other names were supplied by a Head of School. In the Science Area, I was told that at an Area meeting it was agreed that I should not be supplied with the names of those who had applied to the Fund, as this was regarded as confidential information, but that I could approach members of staff at random. This meant that I might approach people who had not applied for Research Funds in that

year, or ever, but in the event, tracking down applicants was not as difficult as it might have been.

Where I had the option of selecting people to interview from a number of names, I tried to choose people in different subjects or a mixture of those who had been in the organisation for some time and those who were relatively new to it, in order to have a sample in which the individuals were likely to have different viewpoints. My initial approaches to interviewees were mostly made by telephone, although in one or two cases I wrote letters or simply knocked on doors. Ultimately, eleven of the fourteen Heads of Schools agreed to be interviewed and allow access to staff in their schools. Of those who refused, one was too busy but did not object to my talking to other people in his school; one simply refused to speak to me about the project, and his secretary told me that he "doesn't like being interviewed". The third spent some time explaining why he did not wish to be interviewed or to agree to my interviewing his staff. His objections were on three counts: one was my being on the staff of another academic institution; the second was a concern about the kinds of questions I might ask. I was told that an "eminent person" had on a previous occasion wanted to ask questions in his school to which he had objected - "I don't see why I should put myself in the position of having to answer such questions"; The third reason was that he could not see any use for the research. It would not do him or his department any good, and it might do some harm so why should they give any time to it?

Taken at their face value these reactions suggest some issues in the relationship between researcher and informant. One is the informant's

view of what research should be like and what constitutes a legitimate method and topic of esearch, an instance of which was also found in the pilot project. The informant's perceptions may differ considerably from the researchers on this point. Phillips (1973) points out that interviewees, like interviewers, have their theories about the world in which they live, and one could add that this may well include, particularly in an academic setting, theories about research itself. There is also the issue of the personal cost to the interviewee of taking part in the project, and no matter what efforts the researcher may make to avoid causing stress to informants, there is no guarantee that they will not find being interviewed an unpleasant experience. Van Maanen (1979) notes that there is often a good deal of "symbolic violence" in fieldwork in that people are pressurised in various ways to give information to a researcher which they would rather not reveal. It can be added that resistance to being interviewed may be the result of having suffered such violence on a previous occasion, which has coloured the organisation member's view of all research methods which appear to be similar.

In the organisation studied, research was itself an issue, as was the status of different types of academic enquiry - some people, for example, considering that physical science subjects were of sounder academic standing than technological or social science subjects. These were strands among the political pressures in the organisation as revealed in the data, and people's reactions to requests for interviews therefore became additional data about perceptions and actions of a political nature.

(ii) Data collection. Most of the data in the study were collected by interviews, each of which lasted about an hour and in most cases these were written up immediately afterwards from notes taken during the interview. The interviews were more structured in the main study than they had been in the pilot project, for a number of reasons:-

(a) I had a better idea of the sorts of issues related to the decision-making process which might be considered "political" and about which it would be useful to have data.

(b) Since I could not expect people to spare me a lot of their time, I needed to structure the interviews a little by focussing attention on the decision-making processes, in order to provide the opportunity for discussing political issues fairly quickly.

(c) I had to bear in mind informants' probable expectations of what an interview should be like - they would probably expect me to have specific questions to ask them about, particularly if they were unfamiliar with the less structured social science research.

(d) I needed an aide-memoire, especially as data collection progressed, to help me to keep track of the various issues that might be relevant to raise with informants.

In order to provide the necessary structure but to avoid the pitfalls of using questionnaires, I used a check-list of topics which might be covered during an interview. Direct questions were asked about these topics if they had not emerged during the earlier part of the disucssion. Topics which appeared on the check-list during the study are given at the end of this chapter. Although the list remained more

or less the same throughout the data collection, with some additions and subtractions, my use of it differed somewhat from interview to interview. More emphasis was given at times to some topics than others, depending on factors such as the amount of time available for the interview, my perception of what information I could obtain from a particular interviewee (bearing in mind the resistance already mentioned) and the stage the data collection had reached, in that the data already collected suggested to me that some lines of enquiry were more worth following up than others. This meant that not all questions were answered by all interviewees and therefore their responses were not comparable on every issue, but it also meant that I could adapt the interviews as seemed necessary and on occasions get answers to questions I had not previously thought of asking. In this way my questions developed from the basic outline as I gained more information about the decision-making processes. In one or two cases I abandoned the list altogether because it seemed to me that I would gain more data by simply allowing the interviewee to talk. In other instances the interview was far more structured than usual, with the interviewee answering questions with little elaboration, in which case the check-list became a questionnaire. Where questions were put to interviewees, they were not necessarily put in the form or in the order in which they appear on the check-list.

Apart from interviews, a number of documents were also provided by various members of the organisation. These included published booklets, minutes of meetings, memos, lists and notices. Some relevant written information regarded as confidential was not made available to me.

As previously mentioned, I also collected data at an Area meeting which I attended as an observer and at which applications to the Research Fund were discussed. I arrived at the meeting before everyone else and stayed until everyone had left, and made notes of what I saw and heard during that time. Further notes were written up immediately after the meeting.

Notes were also made of organisation members' responses to requests for interviews or for access to members of staff or to documents. Copies of all letters written to or received from organisation members were also kept.

Looking back on the data collected, it is possible to identify a number of themes which indicate the kinds of information I paid attention to in collecting data. As will be seen in the categories by which the data was analysed (see next section on Data analysis), I took note of statements about the political perceptions and actions of interviewees and particularly of examples of what participants had done, or intended to do, or considered could be done to further their own interests, either in relation to the decision-making processes which were the foci of the study, or any other issue which was part of the interviewee's context. Their perceptions of the political position of other individuals or groups was also noticed. Within these broad areas of attention, however, there were other types of observation and these will be briefly reviewed here:-

(a) Direct statements about power. These were instances where the interviewee used the word "power" or related concepts, such as authority, control and influence. They included indications of

attitudes towards the idea of power or of using political behaviour and indicated the conceptual models being used by interviewees.

(b) The terms in which questions were answered. These were seen as reflecting the interviewees interpretation of phenomena and their conceptual models, and included their interpretation of what my questions meant. For example, a question about handling disagreements might be interpreted as "being rude to people", as shown by these words being used in reply to the question. Connections between ideas were also noticed, for example when the ideas of "strong personality" and "being tough" were connected. Shifts in perspective between question and answer were sometimes found, as when a question about relationships between Areas was answered by information about relationships between schools, or when a question about why a grant rather than a studentship had been applied for was answered by information about the problems the School had had over the Research Fund allocations last year. It could be suggested that such shifts indicate what interviewees want to talk about and therefore what is important to them.

The kinds of images or metaphors used by interviewees were also noted, as possible indicators of how interviewees perceived their world. For example, "They turned him over up the road" as a way of saying that an application had been turned down by the Research Fund Committee. Sometimes too, the use of certain kinds of words helped to create a particular image of the interviewee. For example, the repeated use of phrases like, "Well, when it comes down to it..." to reinforce an image of the practical man.

In some instances my questions were answered by further questions and these indicated the interpretation of phenomena by the interviewee. For example, in answer to a question about the criteria used in assessing research fund applications, the reply was, "At which level?" suggesting a perceived structure in the organisation.

(c) A further category of observation were things which people told me twice, or went out of their way to tell me. On some occasions I felt I had come across a hobby-horse, something the interviewee felt strongly about and had said before on other occasions and was now repeating to me, sometimes more than once. Instances of people going out of their way to give me information included their taking the initiative to raise topics I had not asked questions about and even on one occasion prolonging the interview long beyond the time an informant had said he could spare, in order to talk about such a topic. I took this to mean that these issues were of importance to the interviewee and were perhaps current preoccupations of theirs.

(d) There was also a category of things not said. This included questions to which I could not get an answer, or instances where, given the opportunity to express an opinion which had been raised elsewhere and seemed to be a recurring theme, the interviewee did not take it. Whether these instances meant that the questions were meaningless to the interviewees, or that they did not share the general opinion, or were simply refusing to be drawn, I did not always have enough evidence to guess.

One example included in the category of things not said, was the almost universal absence of reference to students who were the recipients of the Research Fund awards. Where they were mentioned, this was usually

as political counters in the attempt to gain awards. For example, if they were likely to be "overseas" students, this might count against the School in the allocation. Generally, the Research Fund awards were spoken of as awards to the staff, not to the students who eventually received them. This seemed consistent with the research orientation in the culture, which tended to emphasise the interests of staff and their career concerns rather than the interests of students.

(e) Indications of interviewees' feelings, either about the interview itself, or about the topic they were discussing, were also noted. These indications were found in the words used, but also in tone of voice, sometimes in actions, such as rapping the table with an index finger to emphasise indignation. My impression of the general state of mind of the interviewee was noted, especially when this might have an adverse influence on the interview - such as being nervous, or wary, or as I noted on one occasion "seems to have had a bad day".

One interviewee referred directly to such feelings during the interview "Talking about (the topic) is bad for my blood pressure". There were also indications sometimes that I was straying onto dangerous topics during interviews and these were noted.

(f) There were several occasions on which people seemed to be developing, or changing their opinion during the interview. This showed itself in their expressing disatisfaction with an explanation which they had given me, or changing their opinion, or where my question suggested an interpretation they had not previously thought

about, as in the statement "Yes, I suppose it is competitive now that you mention it". One interesting example of a shift in (stated) opinion occurred when an interviewee explained that he had been advised that it would be "unwise to be honest" over a particular incident in which he was trying to influence events, but immediately corrected that statement by saying that he had been advised that the rules did not require him to give certain information in the case in question. This could have been an attempt to be more accurate in the second version, or perhaps recounting the incident had reminded him that it might be unwise to be honest in giving information to a researcher.

(g) The final category of things noticed during data collection includes my own feelings about the interviews and about the information given. I noted occasions on which I felt that the interview had gone well or badly, my general impression of the interviewee and occasions on which I felt that I had been given false information. It is not clear to me what effect such factors have on data collection. However, it seems reasonable to assume that the interviewer's as well as the interviewee's perceptions of and reactions to the interview are of consequence to the collection of data.

It can be suggested from these observations that data collection is not a neutral activity of recording statements which can then be classified on a cognitive basis, although that is important, but also involves gathering indications of people's feelings and perceptions. These may be reflected in the interpretations interviewees place on what is said to them by the interviewer, the imagery and style of language they use, what they choose to tell you and what

they do not say (given the choice), and their non-verbal behaviour. There is also the question of whether on a different day or with a different interviewer, the data would have been the same. Would different information have been given or paid attention to? In this study, which focussed on the perceptions of organisation members, I had a particular interest in collecting whatever data I could which would indicate how organisation members saw their world but it could be suggested that all interview-based data collection methods provide clues to the perceptions and feelings of both interviewer and interviewee, and that it is as well to take note of these clues, even if interpreting their meaning and impact on the research is difficult. It could matter who is interviewing who about what and when.

(iii) Data analysis. The methodology used in the analysis of the data has been qualitative rather than quantitative. One reason for this is that my interest has been more in differences than in similarities - for example, I am less interested in how many people think the Senate powerful than in the different ways in which it can be seen as powerful. Moreover, as the study by Maddison et al (1980) illustrates there are some adverse consequences to using a quantitative analysis of data about perceptions. Although the authors used open-ended questions along with their rating scales in collecting data, the reduction of the data to countable categories has meant that we are given very little information about what the respondents themselves actually said. The quantification of data has required such pre-structuring of the research that it is not possible from their analysis to disentangle the perceptions of respondents from the perceptions of the researchers, or of their data coder, or of the authors they have

used. In order to retain the focus of attention as far as possible on the perceptions of respondents, and to capture the nuances of their differing views, the analysis of the data in this present research has therefore been descriptive in words rather than numbers. This also seems a more appropriate way of analysing data which for reasons which are explained in a previous section of this chapter, has been collected in a relatively unstructured way.

My approach to the analysis of the data was influenced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) although it does not follow them in every respect. Some themes - such as decision criteria - emerged fairly early in the data collection and were followed up, but detailed coding and analysis of the data was not done until about two-thirds of the interviews (i.e. those for the first decision-making process, the allocation of the Research Fund) had been completed. This was because I wanted to keep an open mind about what the data were going to tell me, and since the check-list was already providing some pre-structuring of the data collection, I did not want to further pre-empt the findings by too early coding and analysis.

The second decision-making process (the allocation of the Equipment Fund) provided an opportunity to follow up particular themes which the data analysis of the Research Fund process showed as needing further data. This meant that Glaser and Strauss's suggestion that the collection, coding and analysis of data should proceed simultaneously, or the recommendation of the "intertwining" of data collection and analysis reported by Miles (1979) were only followed to a minor extent, for the reasons given. Other ideas borrowed from Glaser and Strauss were the use of comparison groups, and the derivation of categories and sub-categories from the data as a step

towards generating theory.

The data showed that the interviewees could be divided into two main groups: those who were asking for resources to use in their own work (who I have called the Applicants) and those who decided how the funds were to be allocated (the Deciders). This division is slightly arbitrary in that two people who were classified as Applicants could be said in some ways to be playing Decider roles, but otherwise it seemed broadly to reflect the overall political structure of the organisation.

Data from both groups were separated out into three broad categories:

(1) Statements which referred to an interviewee's political perceptions,

(2) Statements which referred to an interviewee's political actions and,

(3) Statements about, or of relevance to, the interview itself.

Category 1 (perceptions) was then further divided into several sub-categories:-

Perceptions about:

(a) what the decision-making process is,

(b) decision-making cirteria,

(c) role of committees,

(d) political acts, attitudes, constraints and opportunities of others,

(e) own (political) situation,

(f) organisation culture: research norms and general ambience,

(g) secrecy,

(h) feelings of other staff,

(j) the University in relation to it's environment.

For the Decider group, Category 2 (actions) was further divided into several sub-categories:-

Actions (including refraining from action) to do with:

(a) decision criteria,

(b) using or changing procedures and structures,

(c) general strategies or specific tactics,

(d) attempts to influence junior staff over this particular decision,

(e) general use of rewards and penalties,

(f) own activities in meetings.

For the Applicant group, Category 2 was divided into two sub-categories:-

(a) influence attempts,

(b) avoidance of taking action to influence.

It will be seen that the items in the interview check-list and the list of categories and sub-categories are not identical. This is because questions and answers are not necessarily mirror-images of each other. For example, the question "who makes the decision?" might get the answer "X makes the decision" which would be a mirror-image of the question, or might be answered by comments about the secrecy surrounding the process and in the organisation at large, thus providing more information than the question ostensibly called for.

These various categories and sub-categories were chosen because they represented recurring themes in the data, and they provided the basic framework for the data analysis. The sub-categories were further divided in some instances and also some categories and sub-categories which seemed related to each other in some ways were drawn

together as the analysis was built up.

The data having been first sorted into categories and sub-categories on a substantive basis, that is, keeping close to the organisational events which provided the focus of attention for data collection, they could now be further classified under general theoretical headings. These general classifications - structure, powerful people and culture - were chosen because they reflect general concepts in the social sciences and broad themes in the literature about politics. They provide links between the original categories and sub-categories and also help one to begin to step away from the substantive issues and towards formal theory. These general classifications could then be used as the basis for further sub-classification of the data which would reflect the main themes emerging from the data within each classification. So, for example, under the general heading of "Structures", formal and informal structures in the organisation could be identified. Under the heading of "Powerful People", a title which suggests the differential distribution of power between individuals and reflects on the A-B model of power discussed in Chapter 2, particular roles in the organisation are considered. Under the heading of "Culture", issues in the data which reflected on the values in the organisation, both of individuals and groups, were dealt with.

As a further step towards formal theory, at the end of each section of the descriptive analysis (each sub-classification) are listed the inferences which I considered could be drawn from that section. These inferences perform a similar function to the "memos" recommended by Glaser (1978) in that they move away from the descriptive material,

and substantive issues of the field research, towards a more abstract or generalised statement about what the field data imply. These inferences are hypotheses about the political implications of the data and it is not suggested that they are the only ones which might be drawn from the material. A reader not having been directly involved in the field research, might well see different inferences from the ones I have seen. In deriving these inferences from the data analysis, a narrow definition of the concept of power has been avoided, but I have tried to see how the data reflect on the pursuit of self-interest, or as Weber put it "any chance (no matter whereon this chance is based) to carry through one's own will..." (Walliman, Rosenbaum, Tatsis and Zito (1980)). However, I have not excluded the possibility that this self-interest may be perceived as being pursued by a group rather than an individual. I have therefore looked for the political significance of the data. For example, given that rules have political implications - they affect one's chance to carry through one's will - it seems to me significant if people do not know what the rules are or whether they apply in a particular situation. I have also tried to preserve the assumption that all informants' views are valid, and not to arbitrate between differing views of the same phenomena. It will be seen, therefore, that up to this point, no attempt was made to systematically apply theories about power in the existing literature to the research data, although my own perceptions of power have inevitably, as I intended they should be, been informed by my reading of the literature. As has been pointed out earlier in this chapter, the literature about power is wide-ranging and diffuse, with little of it based on empirical studies and even less on the perceptions of organisational participants. I

considered that it was important therefore to try to see what the data would tell me about organisational politics, rather than imposing existing theories on them.

At the end of each of the three main parts of the descriptive analysis of the data, is a section drawing together the theoretical implications from the inferences in that part. At the end of Chapter 3 these theoretical implications are drawn together around the theme of the opportunities which the perceived context presents for the pursuit of self-interest. These theoretical sections refer back to the theories of power discussed in the review of the literature in Chapter 2. Their purpose is to locate the findings of the research within existing theory and to comment on it where appropriate, but not to pre-empt the theory which might be developed from the findings. The conclusion to Chapter 3 also identifies a key theme which has emerged from the field study and its analysis, and on which the development of theory in Chapter 4 is based. This is a theme constantly repeated in the data and one about which there is little direct reference in the literature on power. Chapter 4 therefore develops this theme from the field research, but (as advocated by Mintzberg (1979) it also goes beyond the research findings to some extent, and suggests a way of looking at organisational politics which would repay further study.

4. Problems of the study

In this section the main problems of carrying out this research will be reviewed (some have already been touched on) and the attempts made to overcome these problems will also be discussed. They can conveniently be considered under four main headings: Theoretical, Logistical, Access and Communication Problems.

(a) Theoretical problems. The conceptual problem of identifying "political behaviour" or "power" in the organisation (already discussed) was dealt with by adopting as broad a range of ideas about the concept as possible. Avoidance of narrow definition of the concept allowed for a wide variety of differing perceptions of the concept by organisation members to be included. This also enabled me to distinguish between behaviour or perceptions which might be labelled "political" by a social scientist, and participants' own perceptions of what might be labelled "political behaviour".

The other main theoretical problem was in linking people's words - the information they gave about their perceptions - with their actions, what they actually did. Unfortunately I was not able to gain access to most of the political arenas to observe interactions between participants in the decision-making process, so that I was not able to check their statements about their activities in the process against my own perceptions of their behaviour. Being able to make more use of direct observation of interactions would have added an additional dimension to the research, although it would not, in my view, have been likely to have provided proof that my informants' statements were either true, false, misleading or crazy. There were some instances, however, in which I was able to observe behaviour, which I considered to be political, at first hand, either because it was directed at me when I tried to gain access to information (a point which will be returned to later), or because, as happened on one occasion, I was able to be present when a committee was playing it's part in the decision-making process. This limitation created a conceptual problem from a theory building point of view, in that it caused difficulty in

making the link between perceptions and actions. My strategy for dealing with this difficulty was to make as much use as I could of whatever direct evidence was available to me, and to use also some relatively unobtrusive sources of data, such as minutes of meetings and other documents, so that I did not have to rely entirely on informants' statements. I was also of course able to look for corroborative or disconfirming evidence among informants' statements, which would at least tell me what was the consensus or conflict of view about people's behaviour.

(b) Logistical problems. The decision-making process for allocating money from the Research Fund started early in November and the decision about who was to receive funds was made by the Vice Chancellor's Advisory Committee early in the following March, and subsequently ratified by the Senate. Since I wanted to collect data while the process was taking place, I needed to interview people directly involved - Area Chairmen, Heads of Schools, Administrators and Lecturers who had applied for funds - before the March decision. Since the Equipment Fund was allocated, from the top down, on a formular basis it seemed likely that it was less politically contentious, and I therefore decided to collect data predominantly relating to the Research Fund decision. This meant collecting most of the interview data between the beginning of the Research Fund process in November and the following March, with the Christmas holidays intervening. Being a part-time research student meant fitting these interviews in with other work commitments and making the most of my visits to the site. I therefore adopted the practice of making appointments by telephone, as this avoids the delay in waiting for replies to letters, and doing several interviews during each visit, as far as possible leaving time between interviews for writing up notes. Since I find interviews quite

tiring, it was counter-productive to attempt too many in one day. On the other hand, since I could not expect busy people to spare me a lot of their time and since I wanted to obtain as much information as possible about people's perceptions of organisational politics, I needed to interview as many people as possible in the time available to me. The interviews also had to be fitted in at times when the interviewees could see me. All these factors have a bearing on what information can be collected from whom and when and can also affect the quality of interviews at times.

The logistical constraints imposed by being a part-time researcher, by the time-schedule of the processes being researched and by the limits on the time which interviewees were able or willing to spare, were dealt with by a process of optimisation: trading off the accessibility of data for an ideal spread of interviewees across all groups; trading off answers relating to what seemed to be major themes for answers to a complete set of questions; using one decision-making process as the main focus of research, and the second one to top-up data on particular topics, which by that time had emerged as major themes, and to look for indications of contrasts with the first decision-making process, rather than attempting an equal investigation of both processes.

(c) Access problems. The political aspects of researching the topic caused a few access problems and some of these have been touched on. It seemed to be difficult for some people to grasp the idea that although I was using the decision-making processes as foci for the study, the research was not primarily about them, but about perceptions of power in an organisation.

The confidentiality of the interviews was an issue which was discussed with interviewees. I explained that the research would be written up as a PhD thesis but that I would try to write it in such a way that individual respondents could not be identified. I also pointed out that the thesis could be made confidential. On one or two occasions I had to explain to X that I could not tell him what Y had said about a particular issue. Few people interviewed seemed concerned about confidentiality and some said that I could quote them by name.

Contrary to the belief of one or two people, I would not be producing a report which would show what was wrong with the decision-making processes in question, and I had to make that clear. Of course, there was always the possibility that the research might reveal problems with the processes, even though that was not its purpose, and concern that the accusing finger might be pointed at individuals or groups seemed to be behind some of the resistance to the project.

Some people, too, showed a certain nervousness in their relationship to the organisation, as though they did not want to put a foot wrong and were therefore being very cautious. For example, when trying to obtain an interview with one professor, I mentioned that I had cleared the project with the Vice Chancellor. The secretary commented, "That's the first thing he'd ask you - he's always very careful". Someone else wanted to check what his colleagues were doing about letting me talk to their staff, before agreeing to my seeing people in his school. Another person, who was willing to be interviewed, nevertheless was anxious that the project should have clearance in

writing and wanted "quite explicit approval" before he felt able to make some documents available to me. Other people appeared to have no such qualms and this suggests that reactions to the project could be reflecting people's feelings of vulnerability in the organisation. What appeared to some people as a threat was of no consequence to others, who perhaps felt themselves to be in a relatively unassailable position. Moreover it can be suggested that people in the Science and Technology Areas, where most (but not all) of the resistance was found, would be less familiar with the methods of organisational research, and uncertainty about what to expect would add to their other hesitations about being involved in the project.

While some people made explicit their resistance to the project, others resisted in more covert ways. One Head of School who had agreed to approach members of his staff about being interviewed, made numerous excuses for not doing so. This circumstance illustrates the political nature of field research. In one way, there was no reason why I should not approach the relevant members of staff direct, since I knew who they were and the Head of School had in effect agreed that I could interview them. However, there was a risk here that, if the Head of School were deliberately prevaricating, he might be extremely displeased if I pre-empted this by approaching his staff direct. I had no way of knowing whether this would be the result, or whether such action might jeopardise my access to other schools, so there was nothing for it but to continue to chivvy the reluctant "gate-keeper" until he finally carried out his promise. I came to the conclusion that he had been waiting until a point had been reached in the decision-making process when the effect of my raising issues about it with his

staff would be less likely to cause him trouble. One could argue that approaching the staff direct would have provided a good test of the politics of the organisation (one of the "field stimulations" that Salancik (1979) advocates) since it might have triggered off some clearly identifiable political activity, and one can see that it might be possible to test organisational politics by such methods - perhaps waiting until enough data has been collected by other means before taking a contentious step. This "smash and grab" approach to research, however, can have repercussions for other people who need access to the organisation for research purposes, not to mention for the reputation of the researcher. One additional facet of this constraint was, I suspect, peculiar to this particular organisation and was pointed out to me, indirectly, by one interviewee. Some informants perceived a considerable antagonism in the organisation towards the social sciences, and it was suggested that if I were seen as behaving inappropriately in carrying out this research, this would be used as ammunition for further attacks on all social-science-related activities.

A further example of oblique resistance was provided by the Head of School who wrote agreeing to see me "if you feel anything useful can be gained" by a meeting, and stating that he "would not be prepared to discuss matters which are properly the business of the reserved areas" of a particular committee. This latter restriction included the names of people in the school who had applied to the Research Fund, but I was told "there's nothing to stop you approaching staff direct and accepting the rebuffs". All this seemed clearly intended to be discouraging but in the event I found the staff members I approached quite willing to be interviewed.

These examples suggest that in researching organisational politics it is possible to gain some insights into people's political behaviour and perceptions through the research process itself, but that some tests which might be made involve too great a risk to present or future projects to be undertaken.

Colin Bell (1978) has commented on the way in which the "locally powerful" can avoid scrutiny by researchers and in this project it was generally more difficult to get interviews with professors than with lecturers, in that the former seemed more concerned with the politics of being interviewed, i.e. of giving information about the decision-making process. The most difficult people to see in both the pilot project and the main study were the people at the top of the power structure - the Director and the Vice Chancellor. In the pilot study the interview with the Director had to be preceded by a meeting with him about whether he would be interviewed, and in the main study I was asked to put my request in writing and explain what I wanted to see the Vice Chancellor about. A counterweight to this wariness however was that in both cases, but especially in the University, a strong interest in encouraging research had been expressed by the heads of these organisations, so that there was some moral pressure on them to be helpful to a researcher.

Salancik (1979) has pointed out that collecting data by an interviewing method which requires getting permission to study the organisation, has the disadvantage that organisation members can thereby constrain the researcher and limit the information which he or she acquires. While not denying that this has been a problem in this research, such a view does tend to assume that organisation members know what the researcher is

looking for, and therefore what to conceal. Moreover, studying a minor drama rather than a major one seems less likely to stimulate organisation members into efforts at concealment.

In dealing with access problems it was undoubtedly helpful at the start to have an informed collaborator inside the organisation (my research supervisor) who could approach crucial people on my behalf in the early stages and steer me in the direction of people who might be helpful. In order to get started with the research at all I needed the Vice Chancellor's permission, and I doubt if this would have been given without some persuasion from the inside. It was also important not to stir up opposition early on, in order to be able to demonstrate to the doubters that taking part in the project would not cause problems for them. It was therefore useful to know who to approach first - the more difficult people being left until possible antagonism on their part was less likely to jeopardise the project. After the initial access to the organisation had been agreed and a start made on the data collection, I was then able to make contacts with interviewees independently and so avoid undue influence by my supervisor in selecting the research sample.

(d) Communication problems. In most cases I found that interviewees were willing to discuss the decision-making processes with me, but even so there were communication difficulties in the interviews themselves.

In order to understand informants' perceptions of the political aspects of these decision-making processes, I needed to grasp the details of the procedures and the substantive issues - for example,

the timetable for applications and the financial implications if the research student receiving an award from the Research Fund was an "overseas" student. Even though a certain amount could be read about the administrative details in advance, it was necessary in the early stages of the research to spend some time in interviews finding out about these details. I could not take it for granted that just one version of this kind of information would suffice, since it was quite possible that different people would have different views of what the "facts" were, and this could affect their political perceptions. On the other hand, given limited interviewing time, I wanted also to explore other avenues. In order to solve this problem I cross-checked some procedural and substantive details with just a few people, but sought perceptions of other items from a much larger number, where there seemed to be less consensus and greater political significance - the criteria used in assessing Research Fund applications being one such item. The problem here is, given that one is researching people's perceptions of political processes, knowing what to follow up and what to "take for granted" as shared background information between the researcher and the informant.

Another problem in understanding what interviewees intended to tell me, whether substantively, in giving me the "facts" as they saw them, or symbolically, in presenting a particular image or role which they wished to play, was that since the interviewees were unknown to me, I did not have a store of previous information about them to help in the interpretation of their statements. Interviewing strangers means that you avoid preconceived ideas of what they are likely to say (based on your previous experience of them) but it also means that you have to tune in quickly to their particular language styles. In this study I found that people differed considerably in the

precision and fluency with which they used words, their directness of expression and their need to be either prompted to talk or controlled from wandering too far from the topic. Starting with some fairly basic questions was useful in the "tuning-in" process and helped in making an assessment of how to approach more difficult issues. Another communication issue, noted by several writers on research methodology, is the credence which should be given to what informants say. Phillips (1973), for example, suggests that one of the ways in which social science data collected through interviews becomes distorted is through interviewees adapting their behaviour to what they think is expected of them in the situation. Looking back on the findings of this research, it could be argued that, in this particular setting, this adaptation might well produce the opposite of distortion. In other words, people who place a high value on research per se, and feel themselves expected to behave like scientists, might feel under an obligation to describe their perceptions as accurately as possible. However, this question of distortion is problematic on other counts. Van Maanen (1979) suggests that there are three ways in which researchers can be misled by informants:-

(a) interviewees may tell lies;

(b) they may themselves be misinformed and therefore give incorrect information, and

(c) they may be unaware of aspects of their own worlds "like fish who are presumably unaware of the water in which they swim".

Looked at with the hindsight of having carried out this research and come to some conclusions about it, the second of these perils is particularly interesting. If it is true that much of what goes on in

an organisation is ambiguous (as this research has suggested to me) then what does it mean to be "misinformed"? It could be suggested that it is not only truth in social science which is culturally determined (Phillips (1973)) but that most organisational "facts" are similarly not objectively verifiable. To say that someone is "misinformed" may be to take sides between differing views of organisational phenomena. If this point is accepted, it becomes questionable to follow such advice as that given by McClintock et al (1979) that "It is important to select informants who are knowledgeable and to know if what informants say is accurate". A similar doubt can be cast on the idea that the informant is "unaware", in it's assumption that the researcher's awareness is somehow more real than the informant's.

It would perhaps be more accurate to say, not that the researcher is being "misled", but that the informant is providing data from a particular point of view. As themselves "participant observers", organisation members can be said to observe through particular sets of spectacles and report accordingly. Moreover, if one accepts the view that, like social scientists, informants too have their theories about social systems and human nature, those spectacles are tinted by preconceived ideas about what might be there.

The question of lies is somewhat different. To the extent that informants are participants in the organisation, they can be expected to have interests and obligations which could affect their responses for good or ill. It can be suggested that when they conceal information or make statements which they consider to be untrue, they are acting politically - furthering or protecting some interest they perceive.

What, in any case, are we to take to be a "lie"? It is difficult to determine where the line can be drawn between giving information or opinions which you know to be false, and playing a particular role in an interview so as to guide the interviewer's interpretation of events, and your own behaviour, in a way which you consider to be most appropriate in the circumstances. Looking at informants in a political light, as participants in the organisation with self-interests to enhance or protect, the recommendation to "believe what you are told" (Schwartz and Jacobs (1979)) seems doubtful, since lies (however one defines them) are interesting data, especially to anyone studying organisational politics. Perhaps a better approach would be to accept what you are told as a justifiable statement from the informant's point of view, rather than either true, false or crazy. Interviewees' statements can then be considered in the light of what other data you have about their context and some assessment made of what meaning they were intending to convey, and what they might be attempting to conceal. Phillips (1979) suggests that rather than attempting to develop methods through which to prove or demonstrate "facts" we should rely more on showing how particular circumstances (presumably discovered through collecting data) would entitle you to draw particular conclusions. If it is accepted that much of what goes on in an organisation is ambiguous (see Chapter 4), this seems sound advice.

5. Conclusion

In this research an attempt has been made to adopt as few pre-conceptions as possible about what informants would tell me, and to assume that they had good reason for seeing things the way they

did, given their vantage point. Perceptions of power have been researched within a particular context in order to tie them to real organisational events, and on the assumption that concepts of power cannot adequately be seen in isolation from their context, since this is politically relevant. This study has therefore attempted to discover participants' political perceptions in relation to live organisational issues which constituted a process over time, and to include their perceptions of the politically relevant context within which their perceptions of power arise. In keeping with this orientation a narrow definition of "power" has been avoided in data collection and analysis.

Although the research setting was a university and the foci used for data collection were two decison-making processes, this study is not primarily about universities or about decision-making, but about power, and therefore differs from studies of such people as Baldridge (1971) or March and Olsen (1976). It fits into the categories of power research, identified in Chapter 2, which are concerned with organisational settings and with power at the level of the individual. By focussing attention on actors' perceptions (unlike the study by Pettigrew (1973)) it is interactionist in orientation, but with due regard for structural issues. Given the diversity of the literature about power and it's considerable dependence on theory which is neither based on field research nor on the perceptions of the actors in political processes, it is not to be expected that a tidy match can be found between existing theory and the findings of this study, however the links which seem most relevant will be identified in the course of this thesis.

It will be seen from the discussion in this chapter that the research falls into a number of stages which can be summarised as follows:-

1. Clarifying/Sensitising to the concept
   - literature search/analysis/write up.
2. Pilot Project.
3. Methodological Review.
4. Data Collection.
5. Coding for main substantive themes.
6. Classification and sub-classification by general theory concepts and political relevance.
7. Writing of descriptive analysis.
8. Derivation of inferences.
9. Location of findings within existing theory of power.
10. Identification of key theme.
11. Theoretical development from key theme.

The researching and writing up of this topic has not, of course, been as tidy as this list might imply, since it has inevitably been an iterative process. The format of this thesis generally follows the stages listed, with the exception that this chapter was written last and therefore is to some extent a retrospective look at the project. In the next chapter I shall turn to the first stage on the list, by presenting a review of the main issues in the existing literature on power.

APPENDIX 1.

INTERVIEW CHECK-LIST

The following topics appeared on check-lists used during interviews. Not all these questions were asked on all occasions, nor was this wording necessarily used. Additional questions were asked as appropriate.

Information about the interviewee (e.g. time in the University, subject group, Research Fund applicant?)

What is the decision-making process?

Who makes the decision?

What feedback do you get about the outcome?

With whom do you discuss the issue?

Who else is involved in the decision-making process? (e.g. who else has applied to the Research Fund?)

How much public knowledge is there?

Is the process competitive?

What criteria are used in making the decision/at what level?

Who are the most important people/what are the main hurdles in the process?

What pressures are there on you/or others? (e.g. to make an application/ decide a particular way).

What alternative sources of funds are there?

How important is the decision to you?

How fair is the allocation?

How do you influence the system/would you change it/do you try to influence it/change it?

How much power do particular individuals/roles have?

APPENDIX 1.

What is the organisation structure/how does your School/Group fit?

How much power do you have?

Is the system democratic?

What connection do you have with other groups?

CHAPTER 2

THEORIES OF POWER

1. Introduction

Power is one of those topics of universal interest about which analysis, description, interpretation and evaluative comment can be found in a variety of literature, novels, plays and poems, as well as in the social sciences. In this chapter on the theories of power I shall confine myself to the literature of the social sciences, where most of the issues have been raised.

This chapter attempts to draw together the main ideas about power which can be derived from the literature and its main function in the research project was to provide a range of ideas about organisational politics which would be of value in carrying out the field study. Except where otherwise stated in this thesis, the word "power" is used to include all power-related words, such as control, influence, coercion and authority.

The approach of the various authors on power can be divided very roughly into three camps:-

(a) Those who deal with the subject primarily in the context of society and the state - writers such as Weber (1948), Miliband (1969), Agger (1964), and Freire (1973) are examples.

(b) Those who are mainly interested in power in the organisational setting - for example, Crozier (1964), Pettigrew (1973), Strauss (1962), Bacharach and Lawler (1980).

(c) Those who are mainly interested in power at the level of the individual, either in considering power as an aspect of personality or the individual's responses to power, including the strategies

and skills employed - Adler (1958), Winter (1973), Emerson (1962), Zaleznik (1970) and Mangham (1979) come into this category. I say these are very rough divisions because they overlap to some extent. For example, Freire has some comment to make about the individual's response to power, although his main interest is at the level of society as a whole. Zaleznik, although primarily concerned with the individual, focuses on the business manager and therefore to some extent overlaps with writers in the organisational group, who, while they refer to individuals and to society, are mainly interested in the way organisations work. Most writers in all categories have some discussion about what the concept of "power" consists of. For some, the substantive issue is the concept of power itself, with society, or the individual, or the organisation, being used as examples to illustrate their view of the concept. (For example, Lukes (1974), Peters (1959), Bachrach and Baratz (1962), Wrong (1979), French and Raven (1959)). The focus of attention of authors therefore ranges between the poles of macro and micro social science and empirical study and philosophical discourse. It would appear that power is not a concept easy to grasp in all it's aspects and levels at the same time, and when it comes to the question "what do you mean by power?" the boundaries of the concept are not too clear either.

Bacharach and Lawler (1980) suggest that the vagueness of the concept of power is due to its being a "primitive term", sensitising in function, rather than fully clarifying the phenomenon to which it draws attention. On this basis, "influence", "authority", "control" and so on, are types of power, being concepts which clarify the primitive term "power".

2. The A-B model of power

The concept of power is often expressed in the literature by the words "the ability to...", as in Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) "the ability to bring about outcomes you desire". (See also Crozier (1964), Goldner (1970), Strauss (1962), Kaplan (1964), Deutsch (1963), Hall and Bates (1970), Winter (1973), Tushman (1977). However for most writers this is not an ability innate in the person, but is seen as an aspect of a relationship between individuals, groups, institutions or classes, in which A gets B to do something, "do" being broadly interpreted to include thoughts and feelings as well as actions. Particularly in the more philosophical literature, this dyadic paradigm is used directly in order to consider the questions it raises in attempting to map out the concept of power. Most of these questions are noted by Lukes (1974) the most important ones being as follows:-

(a) Does the action of A have to be deliberate? Does A have knowingly to attempt to get B to do something before one can talk of the power of A? Bates (1970) is sure that the action of A must be conscious, Winter (1973), French and Raven (1959) that it need not be.

(b) Should one distinguish between power, control, influence and authority? Lukes (1974), Peters (1959), Winch (1959), Hall (1972), Lasswell (1930/60), French and Raven (1959) all wish to make the distinction between power and other forms of A getting B to do something, such as influence or authority. Influence can be seen as distinguished from power in that it is said to involve no coercion, and authority can be distinguished from power in that it is

legitimised and implies acceptance of the right of A to get B to do whatever it is. Lasswell (1930/60) comments that coercion is the distinctive characteristic of what we call power "When coercion enters into the exchange (of resources) there is power". Blau (1964) by contrast, distinguishes between power, which implies the possibility that B might choose punishment rather than compliance, and coercion which allows B no choice.

Handy (1976) on the other hand calls the activity of A getting B to do something "influence" and the reason why B will do what A wants, the "power" of A - some characteristic or situation of A which enables A to influence B. In this model, authority is seen as a type of power. One difficulty with this view is that it requires that some forms of "influence" must be said to be coercive, and it makes less clear the distinction between coercion and those instances of A getting B to do something where B is willing to comply - as in the example supplied by Winch (1959) of A teaching B how to play chess.

In Bacharach and Lawler's (1980) scheme, "authority" and "influence" as types of power, play a different part from "coercion" which is seen as one of four bases of power. Their scheme, too, shows "coercion" as a basis for "influence".

(c) If A tries to get B to do something, and B, as a result, acts in a way which is not precisely as A wishes, how are we to include this in the concept of power? One answer is to include the notion of control as a type of political interaction. Control is a topic with a literature of its own reaching out to the control of technical systems, and borrowing from these systems the notions of target-setting, monitoring and feedback, and corrective action. Social

control and deviation at the level of the state, the group and the individual have also been widely discussed. (See Lemert (1964) in Worsley, P. ed. 1970).

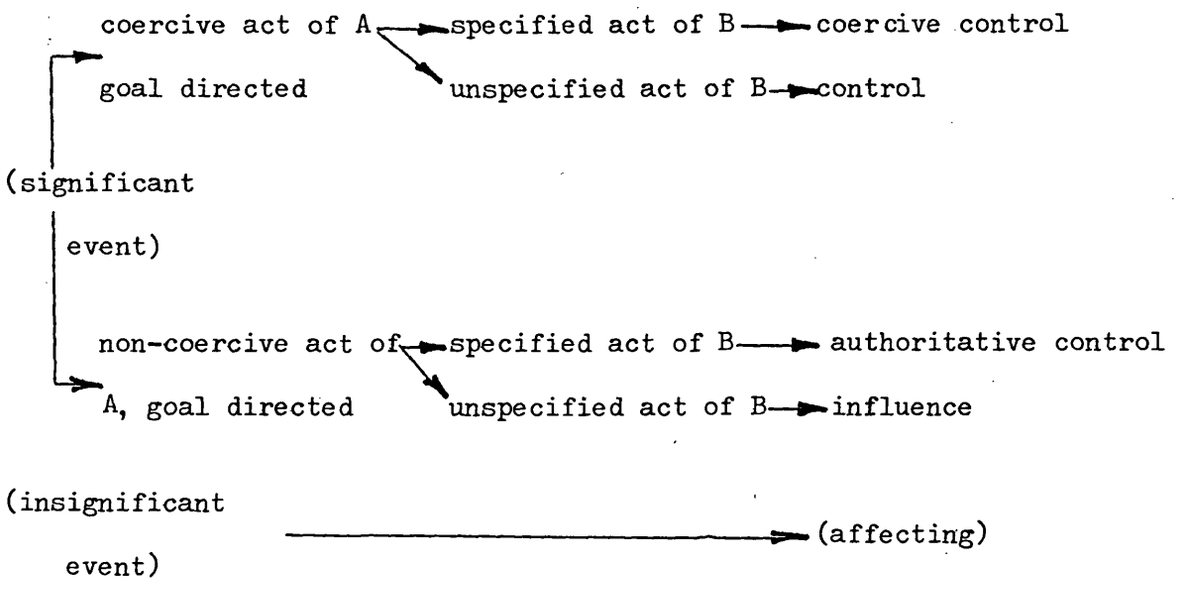
Seen from a political perspective, control cannot exist in a social system without the implication that A is getting B to do something. Where A specifies a particular act to be performed by B - sets an objective or target - and B meets that objective as a result of A's requirement, then one can say that A controls B. Olsen (1970) uses the idea of predictability to distinguish between control and influence. Where the outcome is predictable there is control, but where it is unpredictable, there is influence. French and Raven (1959) distinguish between positive and negative control, positive being where B does what A wants, and negative where B does the opposite, an idea which does not quite cover the situation where what B does is different rather than opposite. It should be said, however, that where "control" is discussed in the literature, especially by authors writing in the mode of classical or systems theory, the notion of "power" as a social system variable is not necessarily referred to (see Ouchi (1977) for example). In other instances, for example Etzioni (1964), "power" and "control" are used as synonymous terms and Etzioni then distinguishes between "coercive" and other forms of control (normative and utilitarian).

Notions of coercion and negative control suggest that resistance is related to the concept of power. Writers are divided on this point however, French and Raven (1959) assuming that the resistance of B is necessarily involved, Weber (in Wallimann et al's translation (1980)) suggesting that it may or not be involved.

(d) Should all instances of B taking account of A's wishes, even where these are not expressed by A, be regarded as the power of A? Social interaction is only possible at all because we make predictions about each other's behaviour and act accordingly. So if we answer "yes" to this question we are saying that "all behaviour at all levels and in all circumstances may be regarded as political" (Mangham (1979)). Some writers, however, want to make a distinction between political behaviour and other kinds. Lukes (1974) suggests that political behaviour should be distinguished from other kinds of interaction by saying that the term political should only be applied to "significant events". An insignificant event may show that A "affects" B but this should not be called power. The problem with this idea is, of course, deciding what is "significant". French and Raven (1959) consider that the concept of power is "useless if every momentary social stimulus is viewed as actualising social power". Blau (1964) also distinguishes political behaviour from other kinds. For him, political behaviour - "social exchange" - is goal directed, and should be distinguished from "expressive" behaviour, which is not. Although neither of these arguments is water-tight, they do reflect everyday usage of the concept of power in which people tend to confine it to particular forms of behaviour and to be able to identify certain activities as "political behaviour".

It is possible to summarise the ideas so far reviewed in the following way:-

Figure 1



The brackets are in acknowledgement of the points made in (d) above.

But one can quickly become embroiled in arguments over such a scheme. For example, does it make sense to talk of a coercive act of A where the act of B is not specified? It might, if one admits the possibility that an act is coercive, not because A intends it as such, but because B sees it as coercive and is therefore coerced. Similarly B may see a specific act required, or see an event as significant, where A does not.

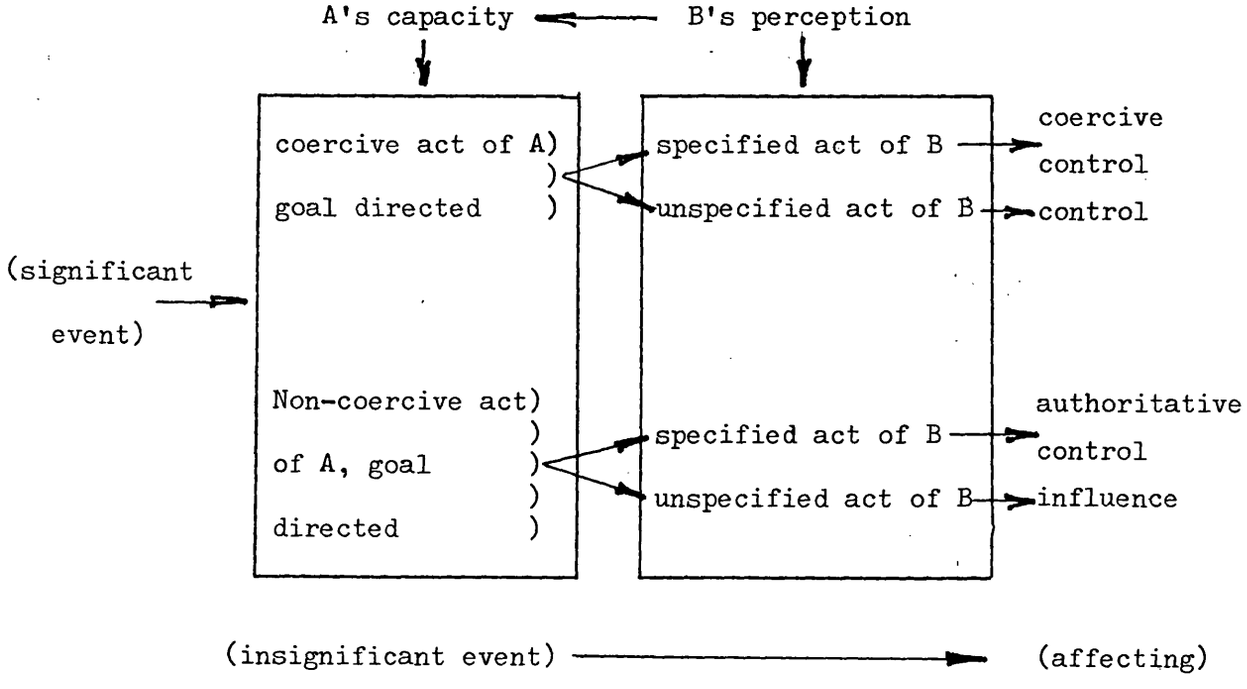
Few writers on power include B's view of the situation as one of the factors which enables A to have power, but French and Raven (1959) show that B's perception of A's power is an important factor in the ability of A to influence B, and Mangham's (1979) Crocodile case study provides an example of how "coercion" over the use of Head Office systems existed very largely in the minds of the subsidiary company's managers, rather than in the direct intentions of Head Office. B's perception may be based on experience of this

particular A's past actions, or on B's experience of interactions with others perceived as similar to A, and will also include B's perception of the likelihood of A's power being used.

Bacharach and Lawler (1980), in discussion of sanctions, which they see as A's attempts to manipulate B by the use of rewards or punishments, point out that there are two probabilities which have to be weighed up by those involved: that the sanction will be applied and that it will have the required effect. They draw attention to the subjective nature of the process by which these probabilities are assessed and to the importance of the deterrance value of this assessment in any conflict.

These various ideas about A's capacity for power in relation to B and of B's perception of the situation can be added to the diagram:

Figure 2



Further characteristics of power are discussed in the literature. It is said to be distributed differentially, so that some people have more of it than others, and that theoretically its quantity can be measured. It is also said to have magnitude, weight, scope and domain (see Dahl (1957), Perrow (1970), Gamson (1968), Tushman (1977), Hickson et al (1971), Tannenbaum (1973) and Zald (1970)). This nomenclature has the effect of reifying power, and leads also to arguments about whether power has absolute or relative magnitude. (See Tannenbaum (1973) and Dalton et al (1968)), Other writers talk more of political acts - the exercise of power as action. For example Hall and Bates (1970) suggest that power involves directing activities of others, making rules for others, enforcing rules for others, setting goals and objectives for others, hiring and firing and making decisions. Decision-making, whether it be deciding to act or to do nothing, has been a central theme in the literature about power seen in its active sense. (see for example Bachrach and Baratz (1962), Pettigrew (1973), Lukes (1974)). The symbolic interactionist view, on the other hand focuses attention on the interaction between people, their definitions of situation and negotiations over these definitions as well as over substantive issues. (See for example Gamson (1968), Hall (1972), and Mangham (1979)). The political processes resulting from the exercise of power are variously characterised in the literature as "exchange", "cons and deals", "games" and "demand and control" processes. (See for examples Blau (1964), Bailey (1977), Allison (1971), Gamson (1968)). Behind many of these views is the idea of power as the outcome of dependence. Indeed, to Blau (1964) unless there is asymmetrical

dependence between A and B there is no power relationship. Such views conclude that the more dependent B is on A, the more power A has over B. The strength of dependence is determined by the alternatives open to B and the relative value these alternatives have for B (Bacharach and Lawler (1980), Blau (1964)). Bacharach and Lawler also point out that although there may be objective conditions of dependence, the use of power is also based on the subjective judgements A and B make about these conditions (p.22).

In general terms, the literature can be seen as expressing the need to see power in broadly two ways - as something one can identify as belonging to individuals or groups, so that it makes sense to say that A "has" power, and as an activity between people, so that it makes sense to say that A "exercises" power. Even if one rejects his labelling of the exercise of power as "influence", Handy's (1976) model reflects the need to distinguish the two aspects of power: A "has" power and therefore can take action to get B to do something. Dalton et al (1968) cannot agree between them on this issue, Zalzenik wanting to see power as dependent on characterists of A, and Dalton and Barnes as a relation between A and B. These differing views can be reconciled by making the distinction between power potential and power use (Bacharach and Lawler (1980)). There have been several classifications of potential power, or the bases of power. For example, it is suggested that power may derive from authority, or from control of resources, or from expertise, or from charisma. French and Raven (1959) and Wrong (1979) provide examples of such classifications, and their schemes are in some ways similar, except that Wrong uses the word "authority" where French and Raven would use the word "power".

One further point must be made about the A-B model of power. Most of the literature in this vein tends to focus very largely on A, but there are some analyses of the responses of B. Emerson (1962) in particular looks at this side of the equation, pointing out that where there is a power imbalance, i.e. B is more dependent on A than A is on B, this represents a cost to B. B will try to reduce this cost, either by an alteration in values so that the issues involved become reduced in significance in the eyes of B, or by strategies for increasing the power of B. By such "balancing" operations, the psychological cost of complying with A can be removed or reduced. Dalton et al (1968), in reviewing Emerson's work, suggest the following list of adjustments which can be made where dependency is unbalanced:

(1) Acceptance of dependency by those placed in the more dependent position.

(2) Reduced dependency or withdrawal by the more dependent party.

(3) Diffusion of dependency onto other objects by the more dependent party.

(4) Dependency increases initiated by the more powerful party.

(5) Blockage of alternate dependencies which the more powerful party might seek.

Some of these adjustments seem to require ego-defences, and several other writers have suggested defences by which B adapts to the power of A. B is said to increase communication with A, to distort the

perceived differences between B and A, to over-identify with the views of A, to increase liking for A, and in general to decrease the psychological distance between B and A, provided that this distance is not too great to start with. These activities are seen variously in the literature as reducing the cost of A's power, or as ways of striving to gain more power in relation to A, or as substitutes for such power. (See Mulder (1960), Hurwitz et al (1968), Horwitz (1964)). A line of argument found in the literature about the reactions of B to the power of A relates to item (1) on Dalton's list in suggesting that B "accepts" the situation or regards it as "legitimate" (French and Raven (1959) .

Winch (1959), Blau (1964) and Mechanic (1962) for example suggest that when a person joins an organisation he or she is thereby indicating an acceptance of the authority of other persons. This raises the question of what "acceptance" means in the context of working life. Dalton (1959) has pointed out that the executive may need to dissemble acceptance of the norms of the organisation, while privately rejecting them. He was considering this question primarily from the point of view of A's - executives attempting to gain and maintain their power in relation to others - but B's on the receiving end of such attempts may dissemble just as much as A's. The practicalities of employment may include the absence of any alternative jobs and for this reason alone B may consider it advisable to pretend acceptance of the authority of A. Moreover, although B may accept the authority of A on first joining the organisation, experience of working in it may bring a change of heart, and subsequent rejection of this authority. And what if B's orientation

to work is entirely instrumental? (Goldthorp (1966)). In this case the issues which in other circumstances might have involved a power-struggle between A and B might be regarded as trivial or of no personal interest to B. The "struggle for power" view of organisation tends to make the assumption that all the actors are personally involved and interested in the various issues arising from the organisation's mission and activities, but motivation theory indicates that this is not to be counted on. There is a difference between B's complying with A's wishes through necessity, identification or fear, and B's complying because the issue is of no importance to B, however important to A. Zald (1970) mentions as a fundamental problem of social systems, along with internal and external power relations, the motivational basis of individual commitment to the enterprise. One can look at the A-B paradigm and ask why A is keen to exercise power in relation to B in an organisational setting, but also what it is about B's motivation which affects the outcome of A's attempt. The fundamental problems cited by Zald are closely related to each other in that commitment can be said to affect political behaviour. Zalzenic ((1968) in Dalton et al) supports this view in suggesting that, in order to exercise power, a person must first internalise the authority structure of the organisation, and that this internalisation is a function of the individual's decision to participate in the work of the enterprise.

The "acceptance" by B of the power of A can be considered at different levels. B's overt behaviour may consist of doing what A wishes, but it should not be assumed that B accepts A's power at

a psychological level. B may deem it advisable to comply with the demands of A, but not interalise the norms which give A power. Etzioni's (1961) distinction between alienative, calculative and moral involvement in the compliance relationship between A and B provides a framework for refining the notion of B's "acceptance".

In his criticism of Lukes' (1974) analysis of power, Bradshaw (1976) has pointed out that the "A getting B to do something" model of power, though useful in the analysis of the concept, presents a picture of an interaction between two people devoid of any context, and is therefore misleading. It also assumes a clarity in the activities of A and B which is often absent in real life. The nuances of the history of A and B and their relationship, their motivation, the presence in the situation of other actors, and the surrounding circumstances, are not represented in this model. Useful though the philosophical writings of people such as Lukes (1974) are, for the greater subtleties and complexities of power one must turn to the empirical studies of writers such as Crozier (1964), Goldner (1970) and Pettigrew (1973).

3. Structure

One theme which emerges from the empirical studies and from authors mostly concerned with power at the level of the state (for example Miliband (1969)) is the relatively permanent distribution of power, its structural apsect. Bacharach and Lawler (1980) see authority as a structurally derived type of power providing stability, and influence as derived from personality, expertise and opportunity and providing change. In their analysis, power derives from the group, rather than from the individual. Hawley (1963) (quoted in

Gamson (1968)) seems to be taking an extreme structuralist view when he says that although individuals appear to have power, this is an illusion, since their power only derives from their position in the system and it is therefore the system which has power, not the individual. Dalton et al (1968) consider that a distinction should be made between structures based on authority and the interaction between A and B which they call influence. Kanter (1972) criticises the interactionist view of power for paying too little attention to structures and assuming too great a freedom for negotiation between individuals in decision-making processes, largely as a result of a pre-disposition for micro-analysis. Macro-analysis, on the other hand, tends to over-emphasise the structural limits on behaviour, but she suggests that organisations do have collective as well as individual goals and takes the view that systems as well as individuals have power. Some of these views seem to be treating the abstraction "structure" as though it were a person, and also to be confining the concept of structure to formal authority relationships, and hence limiting its usefulness in the analysis of organisational power. An alternative would be to see structure as the relatively stable differentiation of roles and groups and the relationships between these. When French and Raven (1959) say that "Power is a useful concept for describing social structure only if it has a certain stability over time" they are implying a rather broader view of structure than simply authority relationships.

The interaction between the political activities of A and B and the power structure which forms part of their context is demonstrated

in the organisation literature. Crozier (1964) for example, shows how the power struggle between individuals can be confined by the power structure represented by the hierarchy. Pettigrew's (1973) study shows how an individual was able to adopt certain political tactics in interaction with other people, because of the place he held in a power structure which provided him with access to decision-making committees and denied it to others.

The political structure of an organisation can be seen as arising out of the division of labour (see for example Goldner (1970)). This differentiates the organisation, setting up boundaries of demarcation between groups, which have an inclusive and exclusive effect. The creation of groups provides the individual with experiences of belonging and of being an outsider, and facilitates the divergence of norms of behaviour and objectives between groups. The greater the divergence between one group and another, the greater the chance of communication failure and the development of conflict. The differentiation of the organisation makes co-ordination methods necessary - the hierarchy, bureaucratic procedures, committees, liaison departments and roles - but just as differentiation provides the conditions under which groups begin to compete with one another, so the co-ordinating mechanisms become pressed into the service of organisational politics. The rational attempt to create organisational predictability provides the conditions and the weapons for undermining it. Bailey (1977) for example, shows how committees can be used by organisation members for political purposes, Roy (1955) how a bureaucratic control system was made to serve the purposes of those subjected to it.

A structure of distributed power is seen in the literature as resulting from the interdependence between individuals and groups which in turn arises from the division of labour. To quote Tushman (1977) for example, "If there is no need for joint decision-making (i.e. no interdependence) and there is no resource scarcity, then the sub-units can make independent decisions. But if the groups are interdependent and must share scarce resourses, they must engage in joint decision-making. Under these ubiquitous conditions the political perspective has the most relevance". But the pluralism implied by such views can be questioned. Zald (1970) for example has suggested that interdependence may become so routinised that it ceases to be perceived as interdependence, and Gamson (1968) and Dahl (1968) have drawn attention to the existence of unused political potential in social systems, all of which suggests that the political potential of interdependence can in some cases be inoperative. Wallimann et al (1980) discussing their translation of Weber's definition of power: "Within a social relationship, power means any chance, (no matter whereon this chance is based) to carry through one's own will (even against resistance)" point out that the word "chance" in this definition not only allows for the inclusion of the structural dimension of power, but also for the possibility that the opportunity for power may not be used.

The strategic contingency view of power (for example Hickson et al (1971)) develops the structural theme by showing that those groups in an organisation which deal with its major dependencies are in a better position to exercise power than other groups. Goldner's (1970) study shows that the industrial relations specialists needed

skills in dealing with the unions and with their colleagues, but these personal abilities alone did not give them power. Power came from the combination of these abilities with the fact that the unions were regarded in the organisation as a major threat. The importance to the social system of the issue to which the group's activities (and therefore the individual group member's) are applied is a major consideration in the development of the power of individuals and groups into a relatively permanent power distribution. Mangham (in conversation) has suggested that the contingency view of political structure needs refining to account for the shifts in salience of particular issues, which mean that the "chance" to carry through one's will is a matter of timing as well as structural opportunity. Pettigrew (1975) makes a similar point when he suggests that the organisational consultant should "time his influence attempts to coincide with periods when his assessed stature is high". Such views tend to emphasise the relatively unstable nature of power structures, those individuals and groups in the ascendancy at one time being less powerful at another. But these ideas have to be set against the views dealt with in the next section about the way in which political structures can be rendered permanent through the learning of values.

4. Values

The ideas about legitimacy (p.66) and about social control (p.57) referred to earlier raise the question of the relationship between values and power. This relationship can be seen from a number of different angles.

In the discussion on structure the way in which task differentiation results in divergence of norms (consensus of values) between groups was briefly referred to, and several writers demonstrate the links between structure, values and power. Pettigrew (1973) in considering the factors which are likely to be sources of conflict and give rise to political activity draws attention to the way in which people learn to adopt certain values through being in differentiated groups, so that political conflict is to some extent a legacy of the organisation's history and the learned values of individuals within its structure. Miliband (1969) and Freire (1973) contend that the existing political structure is perpetuated through socialisation, which is the means by which individuals come to adopt values favourable to the ruling elite and by which the ascendancy of the nature of the powerful is maintained. Bucher (1970) shows how, in a medical school (which she characterises as a non-hierarchical organisation) there are structures in the form of committees and role-sets which provide the means by which people gain and exercise power. Crucial to their gaining power - getting on to the committee - is their "assessed stature" - a judgement made by their peers about their value to the school. Looked at through Miliband spectacles, this value judgement could itself be seen as a political and historical matter. What is considered "valuable" in the school being what those with power (who had assessed stature in the past) say it is. This is not to say that committee members are entirely conformist, since Bucher observes that you do not have to be a tame supporter of status quo to be on the committee. Nevertheless those characteristics which render a person acceptable or not as a committee member are those defined

by the reigning value system. This value system determines who gains access to the political structure, and this structure in turn determines whose ideas will be heard. These ideas presumably include recognition of which issues are to be considered important, and which should be ignored. Thus one can suggest that the structure and prevailing values of an organisation have additional political significance in the inclusion or exclusion of issues from the agenda in decision-making, to which Bachrach and Baratz (1962) and Lukes (1974) refer.

The idea that if you have power your values will prevail is reflected in the definitions of power of several writers, for example "to carry through one's own will" (Weber in Walliman et al (1980)), the ability to impose your point of view on others (Strauss (1962)), "ability of an individual or group to act out successfully its character or impose extrapolations or projections of its inner structure upon its environment" (Deutsch (1963) in Harvey and Mills (1970)). Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) offer a different viewpoint on this issue when they suggest that the way to gain power is to get your perception of the priorities of the organisation, that is your values, accepted. It is not enough to be able to deal with the critical contingencies of the organisation, you must first be able to define what these are and have your definition prevail.

The connection between values and power is central to the notion of authority. Winch (1959) considers that the notion of "the right and wrong way of doing things" is inherent in the concept of

authority, which he sees as fundamental to the possibility of human decision-making. Day (1963) who considers that authority cannot be a coercive power, points out that the authority of governments includes the authority to coerce within certain limits, and that the assessment of whether a government has overstepped those limits and used excessive coercion depends on the values of the observers of such governments. The crux of authority is seen as the voluntary acceptance of it by those over whom it is exercised, and thus it is similar to the ideas of the "acceptance" of the power of A referred to in the secion of the A-B model. Bacharach and Lawler (1980) seem to be confusing the notion of authority when they say that the "unique aspect of authority is that subordinates acquiesce without question and are willing to (1) suspend any intellectual or moral judgements about the appropriateness of the superior's directives, or (2) act as if they subscribed to the judgement of the superior..." and agree with Bierstedt (1950) that authority implies involuntary submission (p.28-29). This suggests not only the right to decide, but also the right to be right, and that authority is at its root coercive rather than based on a consensus of values.

Gouldner (1970) however points out the danger of seeing power and authority as mutually exclusive terms, since those with authority have other forms of power as well. "Power exists quietly, as it were... It makes its presence felt continuously, underneath and alongside of "legitimacy" and all moral motives for obedience... authority is not merely some unanchored "legitimacy", but the legitimacy of power". (p.294).

Day (1963) by contrast suggest that if people obey a government through fear of punishment they are responding to the power of that government, not to its authority. "When a person acknowledges another's authority, it cannot be because he is forced to. This is not what authority means."

Talcott Parsons has been criticised for basing his analysis of social structure on a theory of consensus of values, ignoring the conflicts of interest between groups and therefore political processes, and in his later writings for trying to show that all power is legitimised, i.e. based on authority and is therefore part of the value consensus. (See Lockwood (1956) and Giddens (1968) in Worsley (1970), Gouldner (1970)). Weber has distinguished different types of values on which authority may be based - traditional, legal-rational and charismatic - but Winch (1959) argues that these are not distinct concepts but all based on tradition, since all conceptualising is based on the traditional authority inherent in having a language, where rules about meanings attached to words are legitimised by usage. This suggests that the values on which authority is based are rooted in time and stability and also in a more fundamental consensus of meanings, rather than just a consensus about rights to decide particular issues.

It seems clear that these somewhat diverse notions about authority are based on the concept of "legitimacy", but there is also a divergence of view as to what "legitimacy" is. Schaar (1970) draws attention to the difference between older definitions of legitimacy in which any claim to power had to be justified by reference to some

authority beyond and above the claimant (such as the law) and the later definitions of legitimacy. These later definitions "dissolve legitimacy into belief or opinion. If a people holds the belief that existing institutions are 'appropriate' or 'morally proper', then those institutions are legitimate. That's all there is to it". Helm and Morelli (1979) suggest that such definitions make it impossible for a group or individual in a society to say that they refuse obedience to a regime or institution on the grounds that it is illegitimate, but this seems to ignore the possibility that such a regime may be in power because of its ability to coerce the people, rather than because the people think it "morally proper". These arguments in drawing attention to the distinction between legitimacy based on the consensus of values and that based on an external power source, suggest that, since the consensus of values may exist in the form of unwritten rules, legitimacy may have an informal, as well as or instead of a formal basis, and raise the question of the circumstances under which the act of someone with authority may be said to be "illegitimate"- could it be said to be illegitimate simply on the grounds of a consensus that it was not 'morally proper"? If legitimacy is based on formal rules, it can be assumed that such rules exist before the act of a person to whom such rules apply; but if it is based on an informal consensus, there is the possibility that the act may become illegitimate in retrospect, at least from the actor's point of view, if the act prompts the emergence of a consensus which did not previously exist, or which was not perceived by the actor. There is also the possibility that the consensus within a group may be at odds with the consensus outside the group - honour among thieves being denigrated as

conspiracy by the wider society. Can a minority inside the group therefore claim that acts of group members are illegitimate, even though they accord with the group consensus, on the grounds that they are not supported by the consensus outside the group?

This brings us to the question of the relationship between values and resistance to power, which is also discussed in the literature. The resistance of B to the power of A (using the word power in its general sense) has been discussed in the literature, and it can be suggested that where the values of A and B are not congruent, resistance to the political activities of A, and to the political structure, will arise. Where these activities and structure reflect the values of both A and B, inequity in the distribution and exercise of power may remain outside the conscious observation of either party. However, it appears to be common for members of a social system to notice attempts by others to control them, socialisation not being complete. Crozier (1964) considers conflict to be an inevitable outcome of organisational hierarchy (structural inequality of power), since in his view the imposing of power from the top down automatically produces resistance. Other writers too, for example, French and Raven (1959) consider resistance to be inherent in the exercise of power. Weber's definition (in Walliman et al (1980)) allows for the possibility of resistance but does not make it inevitable.

Another facet of the connection between values and power is the attitude adopted towards the very fact of unequal power distribution. Is this a positive benefit or does power corrupt? Presumably those

who set out to gain power for themselves are in favour of its unequal distribution and do not expect that it will corrupt them. Even people who do not want power for themselves because they lack the power motive (Winter (1973)) can be shown to place a high value on differential power. From the perspective of voluntarism some forms of power, such as "authority" or "influence" can be defended on the grounds that authority is legitimate by definition, and influence in most models of power suggests some choice by B or a congruence of values between A and B. "Expert" power where A's advice turns out to be in the interests of B, or "referent" power, where the power of A is based on B's liking for A, are other examples of more easily defensible types of power, all of which contain the assumption that B plays a voluntary part in bringing about the situation in which A has power. But this is not to say that such types of power are seen as free of all blame. Day (1963) comments of authority "The authority of government, even if Hobbesian, is infinitely preferable to the Hobbesian state of nature where force is the only arbiter. Yet it is also true, as Paine says, that 'government, even in the best state, (is) a necessary evil'". There is also the problem of how A and B's values came to be congruent in the first place, since it is possible for socialisation to produce values which benefit A rather than B, but to which both subscribe.

Some writers clearly see grounds for disapproving of power, at least in some of its forms, particularly because of its consequences for the development of the human personality. Freire (1973) for example sees those with power (the oppressors) and those without

it (the oppressed) as being equally damaged by the power imbalance. The adverse effects of power on creativity have also been discussed. Writing from a psycho-analytic viewpoint, Marion Milner (1950) comments: "... the restraint of one's will imposed by authority could at times feel like a threat to one's whole existence, an attempt to separate one from the very source of one's creative relation to the world". Winnicott (1974) in discussing the development of creativity asserts, "It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. Contrasted with this is a relationship with external reality which is one of compliance... many individuals have experienced just enough creative living to recognise that for most of their time they are living uncreatively, as if caught up in the creativity of someone else, or of a machine". His view does not ignore the need for the individual to adapt to the environment, of which other people form a part, but does suggest that a degree of personal autonomy for B is necessary for creativity and psychological health. Argyris (1972) considers that autonomy is necessary for the full development of psychological maturity, and further suggests that the modern organisation will tend to prevent this process by subjecting the individual to control by others, thus keeping him or her in an infantile, i.e. psychologically unhealthy, state.

Organisational Development theorists and practitioners frequently adopt power-sharing approaches to organisational change through participative decision-making, thereby implying that the uneven distribution of power, especially that associated with centralised

forms of management, is to be deplored. Smith and Drake (1972) point out that OD practitioners introduce their own values into the organisations they work with, and that these values are often of a humanistic-democratic kind. OD is seen as a way of adapting the organisation to the needs of individuals, and a healthy organisation is one which sees these needs as legitimate (Clark, in Bennis et al, (1970)). Organisations should develop along the lines of giving more responsibility and therefore more power to more people if they are to have the capacity to adapt to the ever increasing rate of environmental change. This power must be based on "collaboration and reason", rather than coercion and fear. It has been recognised that these values, based on Human Relations theories, can lead to behaviour which amounts to no more than manipulation (Miles (1965)) and that there is considerable practical difficulty in maintaining the authentic relationships based on trust which are advocated by OD theorists. Kelman (1965) shows the tension between the consultant's power and the consultant's values when he says "... valuing free individual choice is a vital protection against tyranny.... I recognise that freedom of choice is ... a rock-bottom value for me ... But we must remain aware that the nature of the relationship between influencing agent and influencee is such that inevitably ... a certain degree of control will be exercised".

Though writing from a different standpoint, Friere (1973) has a similar difficulty in reconciling the needs of individuals for personal autonomy and the needs for concerted action. How can you ensure that those who voluntarily join your revolution do not equally

voluntarily go over to the other side and betray you? The answer is called "discipline" but really amounts to being powerful enough to stop them - that is, oppression.

Emerging from this discussion is a distinction between needs for personal autonomy for oneself and the need to control other people. Although this distinction can be demonstrable in an experimental setting (Mulder (1960)), in more complex situations it is difficult to see how personal autonomy can be achieved without in some way controlling other people. There is also a distinction to be made between valuing autonomy for yourself and valuing it for other people - seeing it as intrinsically desirable. Somewhere along the border between ego's autonomy and alter's behaviour based on values of individual choice and freedom can slide into tyranny, as OD practitioners have noted. However there have been arguments in favour of the uneven distribution of power. Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) see it as a necessary mechanism for aligning the organisation with reality. Crozier (1964) considers that some individuals must be given freedom of action to make decisions, and therefore have more power than others. Mechanic (1962) asserts that organisations must control their "lower participants" meaning of course that the higher participants must control the lower ones, i.e. there must be an uneven distribution of power. Hall and Wamsley (1970) argue that an even distribution of power in an organisation is a disadvantage, causing the organisation to stagnate. Blau (1970) sees the sharing of power as risky for an organisation, and tries unconvincingly to show that you can reduce the risk of decentralisation by a simultaneously high degree of formalisation.

Bacharach and Aiken (1976) dealing with a similar dilemma - how the higher echelons of an organisation can gain reliable information for decision-making and at the same time avoid losing control of subordinates who supply it, suggest that the answer lies in the distinction between the use of authority and of influence. Authority, they argue, which is the right to make final decisions, must be retained by the higher echelons while influence should be widely distributed within the organisation. This suggests that some forms of power should be more equally distributed than others.

There seems to be a problem about reconciling the perceived need for some people to have more power than others, and the idea that there is something wrong with having power. The reasons why A is exercising power or wants to have power throw some light on this issue. Winter (1973) suggests that people can strive for power for either neurotic or healthy reasons. Healthy reasons are that they feel they have "superior strength", which in organisational terms might be translated as meaning that they feel they have some special skills and knowledge to contribute to the decision-making process. A neurotic reason would be striving for power through fear of being dominated by others (see also R. Nevitt Sanford (1964)). Adler also distinguishes between people's striving to improve things for the future through a capacity for altruism or "social interest", and their unhealthy striving for power as a compensation for feelings of inferiority.

"With great avidity, directly or by detours, consciously or unconsciously, through appropriate thinking and action or through the arrangement of symptoms, the neurotic strives for increased

possession, power and influence and for the disparagement and cheating of other persons" (Ansbacher (1958)). Looked at from the point of view of the psychology of the individual, the difference between acceptable and unacceptable political behaviour seems to rest on whether it is derived from an inward-looking need or gratification, or from the capacity for outward looking "social interest", for although Adler does not say so, striving to improve things within the individual's social context suggests political behaviour of some kind. Mangham (1979) by contrast takes the view that all behaviour is political and arises out of self interest, so that concepts of "selfishness" and "altruism" have no intrinsic validity (although they may, of course, be used as social control devices). Perhaps one reason for the distaste expressed for at least some aspects of power is to be found in the tactics people use for gaining it. Martin and Sims (1956) having interviewed a large number of top executives and studied the biographies of powerful people produced a list of the tactics reportedly used by these people. They include the following: false compromise, that is, pretending to agree to a compromise solution while knowing that you have no intention of acting on it; delaying action - when a decision has gone against your wishes, taking so long to carry it out that it becomes impossible or irrelevant to implement; manoeuvreability - not committing yourself to any project, person or group, so that you can always back down from a project, change your job, and act against the interests of an individual "friend". Dalton (1959) recommends similar "adjustments" which a departmental head should make when dealing with the competing claims of subordinates and

their attempts to counteract his power. Kotter (1978) speaks with approval of a young man who initiated a social activity for political purposes. Bailey (1977) considers that the only way in which a departmental head can keep a balance between academics and bureaucrats in a university is by lying, and observes that it is necessary for principles to be upheld in public but compromised in private. Most of these activities recommended or condoned by such writers could be categorised by Adler as neurotic "cheating of other persons". No doubt this would be countered by saying, as Bailey (1977) does, that it is only by such cheating that reality can be dealt with, so paradoxically the argument can be facilitated that the rules of conduct of the highest order must regrettably be infringed in the name of the interest of the enterprise, thus meeting Adler's criterion of "social interest" as an indication of healthy political behaviour. This argument is undermined by the problem of assuming the objectiveness of "reality". It is interesting to note that whereas Bailey is opposed to the idea of a "real" person behind the role being played,he is willing to believe that there is an objective "reality" beyond the subterfuges and beyond the definitions of reality proposed by the role-players.

5. Rules

There are indications in the literature that among the norms of behaviour in an organisation there are always some rules which draw the line between acceptable (if disagreeable) political activity and what is unacceptable. Bucher (1970) for example, suggests that in the medical school "not being a bastard" in political behaviour

meant not keeping all the benefits of the exercise of power for yourself. Bailey (1977) notes that the roles that people choose to play, the masks they choose to wear, must not differ too greatly between one situation and another. Too much unpredictability or inconsistency of behaviour is unacceptable. The interaction between power and rules has been commented on by several writers and is particularly relevant in organisational life. Bailey (1969) distinguishes between normative rules and pragmatic rules, the latter being tactical guides about how to win in political struggles, coming into play when normative rules are not available or are insufficient to guide behaviour. But within normative rules there is also the need to distinguish between explicit organisational rules, such as "no smoking", and the unwritten norms which draw the ambiguous line between what is and is not acceptable in political behaviour. The use of all three types of rules, and participants attitudes towards them, are shown to be important aspects of political behaviour.

It has been suggested that within an appropriate technology, behaviour can be so prescribed by the explicit rules of the organisation, that it would become "power-free" since the dependencies between persons in the structure would be removed by these rules. (See Crozier (1964) and Ouchi (1977). As long as there is some possibility of freedom of action, some gaps where the rules do not exist or cannot be enforced, political activity is facilitated. Where A can give or refuse permission for B to bend or break the rules, A has the possibility of exercising power in relation to B.

Moreover, Dalton (1959) points out that rules can become outdated, and that a weak manager is one who does not recognise this and who cannot "improvise" in a changing situation where there are no rules to guide behaviour. The strong, on the other hand, "quickly turn ambiguous situations to their needs" - in other words, they use the rules or their absence, in the exercise of power. Astute politicians are, presumably, those who note that there is no rule prescribing their behaviour, or that it cannot be enforced, or that it has become outdated, and accurately predict what they can get away with as a result. They may face charges of deviousness, especially from those who are adversely affected by their activities, but they could equally claim with Dalton (1959) that such is the complexity of political life, no matter what their action someone would regard it as an infringement of an implicit rule of conduct. Perhaps tolerance of a degree of obliquy is also necessary to the astute politician, but since the participants in the enterprise must maintain a certain level of co-operation if it is to function at all, the politician must also retain sufficient support among colleagues. Walton (1965) has drawn attention to this dilemma, in which A, while on the one hand making political gains at the expense of B, needs at the same time to secure the positive attitudes of B. However, some writers have demonstrated that it is possible to do both. Lukes (1974) and Hall (1972) for example show that power can be exercised by A without the knowledge or understanding by B that there is a conflict of interests between them. De Crespigny (1968) also observes that A can have "impedimental power" - the ability of A to affect outcomes for B without B being aware of this.

What Bailey (1977) has called the myths of the organisation, embodied in such slogans as "managers must be allowed to manage" and "business is business" may be used to rationalise the activities of A and substantiate a claim that no normative rule has been broken. Such myths may also help to accomplish the situation noted by Crozier (1964) whereby A can be said to have power in relation to B because B's behaviour is narrowly prescribed by rules but A's is not. Success in the power struggle can therefore be seen to depend on a number of factors; the ability to perceive and manipulate rules, whether explicit or implicit, to accurately judge where the line is drawn between acceptable (if regrettable) action and unacceptable action, to justify one's use of rules especially by reference to some superordinate rule (an appeal to legitimacy); and the ignorance of B.

6. The consciousness of A and B

Some writers (for example Winter (1973) and Adler (1958)) consider that the exercise of power can be unconscious, but in most of the literature the assumption is made that the people involved in the political process are aware of the political nature of their interactions. They are assumed also to be aware of the issues and to adopt deliberate strategies for getting their own way. (See for example Bacharach and Lawler (1980)). Among contingency theorists, with the exception of Salancik and Pfeffer, the identification of the major dependencies of an enterprise is not considered to be in dispute. Moreover the problem of cause and effect, though noted by Dahl (1968) as a problem of power theory, is not given much

consideration. This problem raises the question of how you know that B's action was a response to A's action, rather than some other cause. It is only by being able to make that causal link that one can say that A is exercising power, but in complex political situations this may be in doubt. This difficulty relates to the methodological problems of studying power, which are dealt with in another chapter, but one can note here that one aspect of power which receives little attention in the literature is the consciousness of A and B. What do A and B think they are doing? To what extent do they see themselves as having power and exercising power, and how does it relate to their value systems and their behaviour? To what extent is there consensus among participants as to political cause and effect? Do the concepts of power, if any, held by participants match the views of theorists, and under what circumstances?

There are a few references in the literature to the ways in which people can perceive political activity. Allison (1971) for example, suggests that there are three different models (at least) by means of which people analyse the activities of governments: the "rational actor" model, in which the government is seen as a monolith, or as though it were an individual, making a rational decision among alternatives in order to meet its objectives; the "organisational" model, which focuses attention on the various departments involved, theirroutines and their objectives; and the "governmental politics" model, which considers the competing interests, skills and political resources of individuals. Kaplowitz (1978) has put forward a number of propositions, based

on a combination of power literature and attribution literature, about how power is attributed to other people and the consequences of such attributions. Kanter (1972) draws attention to differences in percpetion when she points out that people inside a political arena may see it as having infinite gradings of complexity, and rate the question of who wins a particular battle as being of great importance, but outsiders may see only a simple division of haves and have-nots, and the issue of who wins as trivial. Dearlove (1973) quotes Sprout and Sprout (1965) "... from the perspective of decisions and decision-making, what matters is how the individual or group imagines the milieu to be, not how it actually is" (p.75) This comes near to the starting point for this research, although the implication that there is an "actual" milieu, or at any rate that it could ever be known, will be questioned.

7. Conclusion

It will be seen from this review of the literature that writers on power cover a wide range of views on the subject, and that it is a topic which crosses several discipline boundaries. There is no all-inclusive theoretical perspective, perhaps because writers tend to stay within their particular disciplines when considering this topic, and some power-related concepts, such as "authority", are seen in radically different ways by different authors. While there is no shortage of literature about power, there is relatively little based on field research in organisations, and hardly any which gives consideration to the perceptions which participants in a social system have of the political processes or structures in that system.

It can be suggested that some general concepts from the social sciences such as "structures", "groups", "values" and "norms" seem of importance to the understanding of power in its various forms. The interactionist viewpoint seems also particularly relevant to theories based on the A-B model, and all it implies, and to notions of political tactics, bargaining behaviour, the "struggle for power" and the pursuit of self-interest within organisational settings. Central to theories about power is, of course, the idea that it can be differentially distributed - some individuals or groups having more of it than others, and this in turn raises questions about whether this ought to be the case, and about the legitimacy of political action.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, the descriptive analysis which follows is based on a field study in which the perceptions of organisational participants were the focus of attention. The theories of power which have been considered in this present chapter will be referred to again in Chapter 3, both through the theoretical sections which come at the end of each main section of the chapter, and through the main classifications on which the chapter is based, and which were chosen for their political relevance.

CHAPTER 3

THE FIELD STUDY

1. Introduction

In this analysis of the field research data, two main "comparison groups" (Glaser and Strauss (1969)) have been used. "Deciders" are a group consisting of the Vice Chancellor, Principal Administrative Officer, Area Administrators and Professors. "Applicants" (with a capital A) are a group consisting of everyone else. I have followed this nomenclature because it is convenient for distinguishing between those who want resources for their work and those who decide who shall have them, given that the field work focuses on two decision-making processes concerned with the allocation of resources. Given this perspective, the divisions into "Deciders" and "Applicants" seems to me to roughly represent the way the university is, and also the way it appears to many people in it.

The amount of information provided in the following sections reflects the information which emerged from the interviews, and also the information which was sought, given the time available for each interview, and therefore sections are not equal length. The section on the structure of the university as a whole, for example, is therefore relatively short because not much information was volunteered by interviewees on this topic, and also because it was not regarded as a priority to obtain more information on this at the interviews.

In analysing the data I have tried to reflect how the members of the organisation saw their political situation in relation to

particular issues. However, it should be noted that they would not necessarily themselves consider that all the organisational phenomena discussed here are of political significance, since they tend to limit their ideas of what is political to a narrow range of behaviour, as compared with the views of writers on organisational politics whose ideas were discussed in Chapter 2.

At the end of each sub-section I have listed the inferences about organisational politics which can be drawn from the analysis of the data. As discussed in Chapter 1, these inferences perform a similar function to the "memos" used by Glaser (1978) in that they represent a step away from the substantive issues of the field data and towards the development of theory. These inferences are cross-referenced to the text of the data analysis, in that the numbers in brackets in the descriptive analysis refer to them, so that the reader can see what it was in the description which suggested the inference. Each index number may appear more than once in the text and occurs at the end of a relevant passage. As was pointed out in Chapter 1, it is not suggested that these inferences are the only ones which might be drawn from the data description, but were selected for their political relevance. Avoiding a narrow definition of the concept of power, they represent answers to the question "what does the descriptive analysis say about organisational politics?". It is recommended that, to avoid a fragmented reading of the data description, the text of each section should be read first, followed by the inferences, which can then be cross-referenced back to the text as necessary.

At the end of each of the three main sections of the descriptive analysis is a section on Theoretical Implications, which draws together the main ideas from the inferences in that section and relates them to the theories of power reviewed in Chapter 2. Since the theories of power in the literature are wide-ranging and contain conflicting ideas, and are not in the main derived from field research, nor concerned with participants' perceptions, a neat fit between the findings of this research and existing theory is not to be expected. At the end of Chapter 3 these sections on theoretical implications are drawn together around the theme of the opportunities provided by the field setting for political behaviour, and this section, like the other theoretical sections, relates the field study to the existing literature. The final section of Chapter 3 also identifies a major theme to emerge from the descriptive analysis, which is little discussed in the literature, and which forms the basis of the development of theory in Chapter 4.

The abbreviations used in the text are as follows:

VC = Vice Chancellor

PVC = Pro Vice Chancellor

VCAC = Vice Chancellor's Advisory Committee

RFC = Research Fund Committee

URF = University Research Fund

FGPC = Finance and General Purposes Committee

UGC = University Grants Committee

SCR = Senior Common Room

2. Structures

(a) University structure. The data show a mixture of perceptions about the form the university structure takes. Although people in the Decider group were aware of a structure divided into three main Areas, this was not always so among the Applicant group. In fact one Applicant had difficulty in answering a question about structure at all, and I came to the conclusion that the idea of the university's having a structure was somewhat foreign to his way of thinking about it. Another Applicant saw the structure as being mainly a Technology group, with humanities and social science as a small separate group and then "odd departments such as Botany, Pharmacology and Languages. I'm not sure how they fit in".(1)(3)

One informant, who felt particularly powerless in the organisation, described the structure in the following way: "We are at the lowest level of a pyramid structure, with people getting to the top and becoming more and more remote". The professor who was Head of Group was referred to as "the boss" by this informant. Another view suggested an oligarchy. "There is a little group of people who run the university and have the power. They are the ones who are close to the VC, for example PVC's past and present."(3)

An informant who had been at Bath for several years compared the structure with that at a previous university, "I am not very clear about the structure of the university. In comparison with other universities, the structure at Bath is not fully developed. Apart from the Profs and Mawditt and the VC, the other people are just appendages for pursuing curiosities rather than being formed into the sort of system you might expect to see."(3)

It was suggested by another interviewee that the present structure could be traced back to the previous Vice Chancellor. "Rotherham instituted a system rather like an industrial company. He didn't like the existing set-up so put another one alongside it. A pyramid of administration resulted which gives power to the Chief Administrative Officer. This caused a controversy about whether the administration ran the university and employed the lecturers to teach, or whether the academics ran it and employed the administration to assist."(2) It is clear from this and other comments that some people see a structure which separates out the "academics" from the "administration", and "the professoriat" from the rest. At least two people seemed to recognise some structural body call "the university" as a distinct entity, as in the statement "I wanted to do this, but the university would not agree to it", where "the university" did not appear to be any distinct committee such as the VCAC or the Senate.(1)

INFERENCES

1. It is a mistake to assume that everyone perceives an organisation as having a structure, or that, where structure is perceived, it will be seen as having the same form by everyone. It seemed to me that those people who had been in the organisation a long time, and those who were in the Decider group and therefore sat on committees, were more likely to have common perceptions about the form of the structure.

2. Decisions of a powerful individual can live on in the organisation even after he or she has been gone for some years, and in spite of changes of direction. This suggests that, once established, the structure becomes valuable to some people, making change difficult.

3. Perceptions of structure are related to perceptions of power, as most obviously demonstrated by ideas of the structure as an "oligarchy" or a "pyramid". However, the perceived political implications of structure depend on the perceived structure, and you cannot take into account the political implications of other structures of which you are unaware. If powerful people are behaving as if these other structures exist, your capacity for political action will be limited by your being unaware of this.

(b) Committee structures

Introduction. All the members of the Decider group were, or had been, members of one or more of the main committees relevant to the University Research Fund and the Equipment Fund. Some members of the Applicant group were unaware of the existence of some of these committees, for example the Research Fund Committee (RFC) or even of the VCAC (which has the same membership as the RFC). About 75% of the Applicants group showed uncertainty about the membership of such committees, or of who the decision-makers were where these were seen to be individuals rather than committees. So, although they had perceptions of the criteria being applied to decisions about the URF, they were not clear about how they were applied or who was applying them. Where people were aware of committees, they did not necessarily consider them to be powerful, decision-making bodies, as will be shown. It can be said therefore that there is not a commonly held perception of the political structure between the two groups, the Deciders group having more information about the who, what and how of the decision-making process, and the Applicants group being generally vague (with some exceptions) on these questions.

The data show that the role of a committee can be taken as an indication of its power in a number of ways. It can be seen as either making decisions while in session, or as simply ratifying decisions already taken by another group. Being a ratifying body does not necessarily indicate a lack of power. This will depend on whether it can, and does, refuse to ratify decisions it does not like. Being a decision-making rather than a ratifying committee does not necessarily indicate high power, since one can ask to what

extent the decisions are constrained by factors outside the control of the committee, or taken in advance informally by some sub-group, with only a facade of decision-making left to the committee when in session.

It will also be seen that representation on committees can become an important issue, either because this is seen as affecting the balance of advantage between different groups, or because of the ambiguity which can arise over whether committee members are, or ought to be, representing particular groups.

The data collected in this study throw light on interviewee's perceptions of the following committees: the Senate, Vice Chancellor's Advisory Committee (VCAC), particularly, but not exclusively as it functions as the Research Fund Committee (RFC) Area Committees, and Boards of Studies. Data from committee records and other written documents has also been used.

(i) The Senate. Most comments about the Senate were along the lines that it was a "rubber stamp" for decisions made elsewhere, sometimes said with a certain amount of derision, but also in some instances with something like approval. Evidence was provided that it was not seen as entirely powerless. For example, it was suggested that "it would have something to say" if the URF decisions were not roughly fair, thus providing a check on the freedom of decision-makers. It was also reported that the Senate had prevented a move to transfer some of its power over a particular issue to the VCAC. One suggestion for the apparent lack of power of the Senate was that it delegated decision-making to other committees and "let them get on with it". According to the University Statutes, the

Senate can, among other things, "review, amend, refer back or disallow any act of any Board, Committee or appointed body, of any School, Department, Institute, Delegacy or other such academic sections of the University". The word "academic" is interesting here and raises the question of whether the VCAC might be considered as an "academic" committee and whether the allocation of money from the Research Fund and the Equipment Fund are considered to be "academic" matters. There seems to be some ambiguity on this issue, resulting from the way the university as a whole is structured. The Senate Chairman's statement, "The Senate normally accepts the allocations (of the Research Fund Committee) but could refer them back I suppose... I don't know if there is a rule book about this - things get done more by custom and practice (laughing) than by the rule book", suggests that if the Senate does have formal powers over this issue they have not been much asserted and therefore the position is unclear.(1) It also suggests a certain nervousness on the Chairman's part about discussing this absence of clarity. The view has been expressed that this ambiguity about the Senate's actual powers is in itself a "political manoeuvre" and there have been demands from some members of Senate for clarification of these powers, but so far these demands seem not to have been met.

One informant indicated the extent and nature of the Senate's power when he referred to it as "an interfering body" and said he adopted the strategy of not giving it the opportunity to interfere in his school, "I don't expose the school to the Senate unless I have to". Senate meetings were said to be a "bore", but on the other hand, "you have to monitor the monitors" and so reports from the VC and

the Long Range Planning Committee are listened to, to make sure they "don't do anything to curtail the activities of the School" and also to keep the School informed. This suggests that the interference might come, not just from the Senate itself, but from other individuals and committees whose decisions might be ratified by the Senate to the detriment of the school.(6)

Other comments about the Senate suggested a view of it as part of a grievance procedure. For example, it was said that in the past the Senate had been used by members who wanted to raise issues that were being blocked by their Head of School. By getting themselves elected to the Senate, lecturers were able to make grievances public in spite of the Head of Scholl's opposition. Another informant spoke with disapproval of the way people use the Senate to make complaints. However, it was also suggested that as a forum for grievances perhaps the Senate was not very effective, partly because of disinclination on the part of the aggrieved to make use of it: "when it comes to it, no-one wants to put themselves forward for election". Another reason given was that the really powerful committees were the Area Committees and the VCAC, to which people who were not Head of School had no direct access, either through minutes or through personal representation. It has been pointed out that Area Committee minutes go to the Board of Studies, but the point being made here is that the reverse does not apply - Board of Studies minutes do not go to the Area Committee, and the Board of Studies has to rely entirely on the Head of School's willingness to put its views to the Area Committee. On this view, a Head of School can effectively block the appeal of aggrieved parties to the committees which really matter. However, it seems clear that

some people at any rate see the Senate as worth taking trouble over, in that it was reported that a "cabal" of non-professorial members get together before Senate meetings take place.(1)

The view of the Senate as a possible resolver of grievances was clearly not approved by the informant (a member of Senate) who summed up its role in the following way: "The Senate is not intended for resolving conflicts, but it checks what's going on and takes action if the tide is flowing in the wrong direction. It doesn't usually initiate action, but will refer back decisions that it doesn't like".

In general I think it can be said that people who are members of Senate see it as rather more powerful than people who are not members and who are more inclined to see it as a powerless "rubber stamp".(1) It may also be true, as suggested by one informant, that some people use the Senate meetings as a way of gaining "air time" for pursuing their own private interests. One further comment worth noting is "The Council rubber stamps the VC and the Senate is a rubber stamp too" with its hint that it is not other committees whose decisions are being complied with by the Senate and Council, but particular individuals, in this instance the Vice Chancellor, whose role will be discussed in a later section. It is a reminder that it may be individuals who are seen as powerful rather than committees. This view was also endorsed by the comparison one informant made between the Senate and the Council, which reflected on the relationship between the two committees, but also indicated the power of individuals to influence their decision-making: "There is a fiction that the Council governs, but the Senate has to control

the Council. The Senate itself is manipulated by the VCAC and the VC, but the Senate can in the end make decisions, whereas the Council can only operate on the information given to it by the Senate, and the Senate only gives it the information it wants". One distinctive difference between the Senate and the Council is that the latter includes people from outside the university in its membership. According to my informant, these "laymen" have to be "cajoled and bullied", the implication being that it is the university members, some of whom are also members of Senate, who really have the power in the Council and are presumably in a position to manipulate both committees. The Senate was said to have "a long running fantasy about what the university should be like, and you have to manipulate this fantasy. You gain power in the Senate through power of advocacy". This informant was aware of other forms of power which he had in other arenas, and seemed to take the view that people could "switch off" their knowledge of these other forms and only concern themselves with his powers of advocacy when in the Senate meeting.(3)(4)(5)

Another informant took the opposite view of the relative powerfulness of the Council and the Senate, pointing out that a major difference between the two was that the Council dealt with resources, while the Senate was concerned with academic matters, suggesting that this gave the Council the greater power. The "lay" members of the Council in his view, were not people easy to bully.(3)(4)

Evidence of the power relationship between Council and Senate is reflected in the formal Statues of the University (October 1974),

which show that of the functions of the Senate laid down by the Statutes, 40% contain statements requiring the Senate to refer matters to the Council. This is somewhat off-set, however, by the requirements in 30% of the statements about the functions of the Council that it should take the wishes of the Senate into account. This seems to put the balance of advantage with the Council as far as formal intentions are concerned, however, the effect of overlapping membership of various committees in the organisation cannot be ignored, and in the following pages I shall present some information from official records which illustrates this feature of the committee structure, and also throws light on the question of representation of different interests on these committees.

In the academic year 1979-80 eighteen people could be identified as being members of a number of different committees, generally regarded as important in the organisation. The following table shows the pattern of their committee membership and indicates whether they are in the Arts (A), Science (S) or Technology (T) areas, or are members from outside the university (O). Some academic members are also members of Boards of Studies, and this information is given where it is available. Student members, and administrative officers have been excluded from the following analysis.

TABLE 1 Pattern of committee memberships

Member	Area	Council	FGPC/	VCAC	Area C'tee	Senate	Board of Studies
1	(VC)	X	X	X	X*	X	-
2	O	X	X				-
3	A	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	O	X	X				-
5	O	X	X				-
6	O	X	X				-
7	A	X	X	X	X	X	X
8	T	X	X			X	
9	A	X	X			X	
10	O	X	X				-
11	S	X		X	X	X	X
12	T	X		X	X	X	X
13	A	X			X	X	X
14	S	X			X	X	X
15	S	X					X
16	S	X			X	X	X
17	T	X				X	
18	T	X				X	

X indicates membership.

* ex officio, not normally exercised.

/ Finance and General Purposes Committee (a committee of the Council).

There are forty-six members of Senate and thirty-two members of Council, so it can be seen that there is a sizeable minority with

a foot in both camps. Also, if one takes as an example the Finance and General Purposes Committee, which is generally regarded as influential by those who are aware of its existence, half the members are outsiders and of the rest, the Arts area is strongly represented, and Science not all, unless one counts the VC (who is a scientist) as representing Science. This is not to say, of course, that this committee is intended to be representative of particular area interests; it is simply noted here that the representation works out that way.(1)(3)(5)

However, representation is not just a function of who is entitled to attend, but also of who actually does attend. Again taking the FGPC as an example, one can compare the number of "outsiders" and "insiders" who were entitled to attend (figures in brackets) with the numbers who actually did attend during the year 1979-80:

TABLE 2 Outsiders and insiders committee attendance

Meeting No.	No. of Outsiders	No. of Insiders
1	5 (5)	5 (5)
2	3	5
3	2	5
4	3	3

If one adds to these figures the four "insiders" who attend each meeting in a non-voting administrative capacity, and who include the Accountant, Bursar and Principal Administrative Officer, and

also the three student members who attended at least three of the four meetings, it would appear that the representation is overwhelmingly in favour of the "insiders".(5)

Further complexities of the issue of representation on formal decision-making bodies can be illustrated by considering membership and attendance of the Senate for 1979-80. Tables 3 and 4 show the effect of attendance and non-attendance on representation of different schools and Areas, taking into account the numbers of staff represented by each Senate member.(5)

It will be seen that representation on the Senate is not evenly spread among the Schools, and since some membership is ex-officio but some by election, it can be suggested that representation reflects also the interest of members of the School in putting up for election, as well as the perceived suitability of members of the School to be members of Senate. Difference in representation is not necessarily related to the size of the School, as the table shows. The School of Management, for example, has thirty-four staff members and four representatives, whereas the School of Biological Sciences has thirty-seven staff members and two representatives. Chemical Engineering with eight staff members also has two representatives. It can be assumed that the fewer the staff being represented the better chance they have of influencing their representative, however, this could be offset in committee by the perception of other members that the representative "only" represents a small School and also by non-attendance by the representative. The optimum situation for constituents would therefore seem to be membership of a large school but with a large number of representatives in the Senate, and moreover, ones who always attend.(5)

TABLE 3 Membership and attendance at Senate meetings, 1979-80 (9 meetings)

A	B	C	D	E	F	G		H	
School	Total School Staff**	Total Senate Members for School**	No of Attendances by Reps (total possible 9 x C)	No of School Staff Represented by each Senate member B ÷ C	No of School Staff Represented by Attendance B ÷ D	Ranking by Column: E	F	Differences between E and F in column G	
Architecture	21	2	10	11	2.10	10	12	2	-
Biology	37	2	9	19	4.10	14	14	0	
Chemical Eng	8	2	15	4	0.53	1	1	0	
Chemistry	16	1	8	16	2.00	13	11	2	+
Education	17	3	22	6	0.77	4	3	1	+
Elec Eng.	26	5	35	5	0.74	2	2	0	
Engineering	35	4	35	9	1.00	7	5	2	+
Hum & Soc Sci	48	5	27	10	1.78	9	9	0	
Management	34	4	31	9	1.10	7	8	1	-
Materials Sci	10	2	10	5	1.00	2	5	3	-
Maths	36	3	16	12	2.25	12	13	1	-
Modern Languages	20	3	21	7	0.95	5	4	1	+
Pharmacology	32	3	18	11	1.78	10	9	1	+
Physics	15	2	14	8	1.07	6	7	1	-

* School staff numbers exclude research officers, visiting fellows, visiting professors, demonstrators, research assistants and administrators.

** Senate member numbers exclude library staff, CEIS and CAS staff, the VC, Students, administrators.

TABLE 4 Summary of Table 3 by Areas

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Area	Staff Nos.	Sen't Members	Attds	Staff per Member	Staff per Attdce	Ranking (E and F)
Tech.	90	13	95	6.9	0.95	1
Sci.	146	13	75	11.2	1.95	3
Arts	119	15	101	7.93	1.18	2

Two further factors have to be taken into account, however, one being whether a representative who does not always attend, does attend when issues important to the School are beind discussed, and the other is the skill with which the representative deals with the committee.(2)

It is interesting to note that although Science is seen by many people as powerful in the university, it is not well represented on the Senate in terms of the evidence given in Table 4. Moreover, Modern Languages, which appears to some people to be in a relatively weak position in the university because it is the only pure arts School, is better represented than most. It may be that Schools and Areas which feel themselves to be at a disadvantage take more trouble to be represented on decision-making committees such as the Senate, and regard attendance as more important to them. The School of Biological Sciences' representation is particularly low by comparison with the numbers of staff in the School, and it is also a School in which there has been considerable disquiet expressed over

its representation at the Area Committee. It may be that people in this School feel that Area representation is more important to them than Senate representation, and that, as one informant suggested, committees compete with each other, in this instance for the involvement and interest of the staff. People will perhaps tend to spend their time and energy on those committees which they consider to provide the best return on their investment.(1)(5)

INFERENCES

1. The nature of a committee, its formal and informal power and its purpose, can be ambiguous, thus enabling different individuals to take differing views of its value. Deciding to participate and be active in a committee is presumably a function of (a) wanting to achieve or avoid something and (b) seeing that committee as a means of achieving and/or avoiding it. Participation in a committee appears to change one's view of its power and purpose, but where people have a choice of whether to join or not, one can assume that they already think it worth while before they become members.

2. The question is raised as to whether it makes sense to talk about committees having power, or whether it is more realistic to say that certain individuals who are committee members have power and exercise it through influencing other committee members. The perception of a committee as being powerful or not depends, of course, on the perception that it exists.

3. Membership of two or more committees in a decision-making chain may provide individuals or sub-groups of such committees with power to manipulate them. However, there is a danger in looking for uni-directional causation when considering which committee is more powerful. It may be nearer reality to say that such committees influence each other, and this enables some people to say that the one committee is the more powerful, and others to say that the other committee is, both with justification.

4. Participants reflecting on committees may present a tidy, rationalistic view of the cause and effect of influence, but this

presumably represents their personal ground rules for political action, since these "rational" views of different people may not agree. The question arises as to whether people's behaviour within a committee is governed by their perceptions of the committee, or whether their perceptions are governed by the way in which they wish to act.

5. Whether or not representation on formal decision-making committees is a political advantage to a group can be seen as depending on a number of factors: the numbers of representatives in relation to the numbers of constituents in the group, the actual attendances at committees of those representatives and the coincidence of their attendance with issues important to the group, the relative importance of a particular committee on which the group is represented in comparison with other committees, the quality of communication between the representatives and their constituents, and the skill with which the representatives deal with the committee. Being represented by those who are perceived by other committee members to be powerful may also be more important than the number of representatives.

6. "Rubber stamp" committees can be dangerous, since they may accept recommendations of group A which are disadvantageous to group B, without the committee being fully aware of the implications of its acquiescense.

(ii) The Vice Chancellor's Advisory Committee. The VCAC consists of the Vice Chancellor, two Pro-Vice Chancellors, three Area Chairmen, and the Principal Administrative Officer. Membership therefore changes as different individuals take up these roles. When considering the applications to the University Research Fund, the committee becomes the Research Fund Committee (RFC). Unlike the Senate and Council, this committee is not set up by statute.

Perceptions of the Deciders group about the power of the RFC to decide about the allocation of the research fund are indicated by statements that "the absolute priority over all areas is determined by the RFC" and "The VCAC makes the ultimate decision on who gets grants. It sets the policy and decides accordingly". But some constraints on that power were indicated: "the RFC sticks to the priorities of the Area Committees", "On the question of prioritising in principle we evaluate the projects scientifically, but in practice there has to be equitable sharing - a kind of rough justice".(1)

It would appear that at the RFC meeting the main argument is over the split of funds between the Areas, as to how many awards each is going to get, on the basis of what is to be considered "fair". Comments were made reflecting views of the role of committee members in this process. "You know the composition of the meeting. The Area Chairmen are there to represent their areas, and the PVC'c - they have the lists in front of them and come to an agreement on what seems fair". When questioned about the Area Chairman "representing" the Areas the interviewee did not want to say that they were representatives. (One can see that, other considerations apart, this would raise the question of who the PVC's "represent"). Instead it

was suggested that "Six rational people try to make the best decision".(1)(3)

Other informants were less squeamish on the question of representation: "The RFC look - unconsciously, although they say they don't - everyone wants something for their own area (laughing) - they're prejudiced towards a fair distribution. This is not consciously expressed. It is not done on the basis of numbers of students in each area or anything like that". "At the VCAC everyone tries to get the best for their own school (sic), but also for the university as a whole".

It can be said that people in the Deciders group would have liked to have been able to say that the RFC was looking for the best applications, but had to admit that it was in fact a question of sharing out the money fairly, and what someone referred to as "the horse trading that goes on".(2)

Some doubts were expressed about the fairness of representation at the RFC, thereby reinforcing the view of it as "representing" the interests of particular groups. "The RFC is the VCAC in a different guise. Perhaps that isn't right - it used to be an independent research committee with people on it not necessarily VCAC members. I doubt if it is entirely free from bias. Each Area Chairman is present but also the PVCs who come from two of the Areas, so there is a built-in imbalance. There is a science bias because science has more departments. The VC is a physicist and doesn't have much feel for engineering." Of course, to some people this imbalance is an advantage. "It is a small committee and with Iain and Ray on it there is almost bound to be something for the School of

Management", a comment which suggests that it is School bias, not just an Area bias which operates at the meeting.(4)

Because people try to say that the RFC decides between applications on the basis of an evaluation of their merits, i.e. that the "best" applications are awarded, people who accept this "merit" theory of RFC decision-making may also doubt the fairness of the outcome because they do not think that such a committee can make such decisions in the circumstances. Apart from the comments that they would be unable to assess the merit of applications in fields in which they were not expert, it was suggested that they are not provided with sufficient information in order to make a proper judgement. It seems easier to substantiate the "rough justice" of the decision if it is not seen as based on merit.(3)

On the question of it being a "rational" decision, a member of the Applicants group suggested that a "carve up" of funds between areas was a more "rational" solution than giving money to the best applications, which might then be concentrated in one Area, and another commented, "I feel that it starts with relatively rational criteria, and becomes rather less rational as it progresses through the system". The RFC is the last point in the decision-making process of any significance, and the least "rational" on this view, but it should also be noted here that the RFC is also the least accessible committee to any applicant. One member of the applicants group however wanted to hold staunchly to the view that the RFC made its decisions on the basis of merit, i.e. back to the idea of evaluating the projects "scientifically". "The merit of the present

system is that the best applications from the whole university would get awards from the fund". Although challenged with evidence that even at school level the system was being turned into an allocation system rather than a merit system, he was reluctant to give way, "That's going a bit too far".(2)

On the question of whether the RFC "really" makes decisions, or simply goes through a facade of decision-making and arrives at foregone conclusions, it was clear that interviewees in the Deciders group could not easily predict the outcome. Some attempts at prediction were made: "We will get at least five awards and not more than twenty" (a wide margin of error this!) "We are likely to get two grants and two studentships", "You can make an intelligent guess how many grants Technology might get, say four or six". This last prediction was the only accurate one if "grants" here means "awards", as it probably did, in that each Area received four studentships in the event.

Because the outcome of the RFC deliberations is not easily predictable, the allocations are sometimes not as expected by those who try to see what basis is being used for the decision. Hence this comment, "The rules have been changed, not at Area level but at RFC level. We infer the change of rules from the answers we get". That is, if the RFC only awards studentships, this is taken as a decision rule that grants are out. Uncertainty about the decision rules was also reflected in this comment by a member of the Decider group, "The problem is that the rules change... Last year there seemed to be a priority that no-one over lecturer grade would get an award, but they won't say so definitely".(5)(7)

One committee member who was aware there was an element of allocation of funds between Areas at the meeting, and that this was subject to change, nevertheless expected such changes to be small. "All funding is done this way. You start with the historic or existing pattern and then adjust it slightly. Like doing equations, you are less likely to make a mistake if you go by small adjustments".(10) In the event, the "historic" 6-4-2 split between Science, Technology and Arts areas respectively, was radically changed to a 4-4-4 split, and one member of the Deciders group commented that people in his area were very upset at this result, especially at the Arts Area "getting so much".

Because of the unpredictability of the outcome, it was suggested by one committee member that it was necessary to find out "which way the wind is blowing", in advance, and with a wide variety of decision-criteria to choose from (see p.248) it is necessary to have a good idea which ones are going to turn into deciding issues.(6) For example, if you put forward a large number of applications for grants, and then the committee decides to award only studentships, your Area may lose out.

With a variety of criteria to choose from it is also possible to use them selectively in support of one's own case. For example, if one Area Chairman wants to say that another should get fewer studentships, he can raise the question of whether the applications of the other Areas are really comparable in academic merit with his own. Or if one Area has put forward named students for its studentship applications, but the Area Chairman sees that another Area has not done so, he can raise this as an issue. A further example concerns

the criterion sometimes cited that studentships should be for new, young or junior staff, although not everyone approves of this criterion. As one Area Chairman put it, "my applicants are not inexperienced people, and this might become an issue at the meeting if someone chooses to raise it".(6)(7)

As far as the procedures adopted in this committee and the quality of its interactions are concerned, information was not too easy to obtain, because as someone commented, "it is a very private meeting". Most committee members became uneasy when asked direct questions about it. It was interesting to note that this very privacy could be used as a political weapon at the meeting. One member said that on one occasion he had threatened to take an issue outside the meeting and that this had induced other members to make a concession. Such a threat is "always a good point in negotiating".(8)

The procedure used at the meeting is not clear. One informant told me that on a previous occasion the Chairman had himself proposed that they should start the RFC with the basis that eight of the available studentships should go to science, that is, there was an opening bid from the Chair. However, when I asked the Chairman whether he started off the meeting by suggesting an allocation between Areas he replied, "There is no set procedure. It changes every time and how it's done depends on who is present". This flexibility of approach is consistent with other information, and the comment also suggests that the Chairman does not entirely control the procedure at the meeting and that there is the chance for opportunistic initiative, all of which would be consistant with other data.

However, another informant stated that the procedure of taking agenda items in turn which was followed at the meeting, could affect the fortunes of a particular Area, and it would appear that being first on the Agenda, and thereby being the first to speak for your Area, could be an advantage. This would suggest that there is some procedure which is routinely followed, and that this could affect decision outcomes.(6)(9)(10)

Perceptions of the quality of interaction at the meeting varied from, "There is a friendly atmosphere - although I don't know what will happen to that if the economic climate declines" to comments about "the fighting" and "the lion's den". "I cruelly knocked him down" was how one member described the way he had dealt with the argument of another. Although there did not seem to be a pre-meeting cabal, and indeed the short time-scale between the circulation of the agenda and papers and the meeting itself would make that difficult, it was clear that people from the same Area did discuss issues beforehand and that there were alliances formed between committee members. In some ways it appears to be a kind of bridge game in which people calculate the value of their own cards, those of their allies, and those of their opponents, and play accordingly. It is apparently the practice to hold the RFC meeting immediately following a regular meeting of the VCAC, and there is evidence that what happens in the preceding meeting spills over into the interaction at the RFC. One member who had been attacked at the VCAC, reported that he "was not disposed to give way" on an issue at the RFC as a result.(11)

There was not much data about the VCAC from the Applicants group, for the reasons already suggested, that they have no direct access to this

meeting and little information emerges from it because of its private nature. Many of its papers are on a restricted circulation, and as already mentioned, many people in the Applicants group had little awareness of this committee. Those who were aware of it, mostly thought it powerful, but one applicant commented that although he had heard the VCAC was powerful in its way, he did not believe that the real power in the university resided in official committees.

INFERENCES

1. Although a committee may be seen as powerful in that it can really make decisions rather than ratifying or in other ways "rubber stamping" decisions made by others, it may nevertheless need to be able to justify the decision to other members of the organisation.

2. The basis of the justification may clash with people's values on the one hand, or with the rationale for the entire procedure on the other. So, saying that the basis of the decision is academic merit is compatible with values held by people in the organisation that academic merit should win out, but it reveals that a justifiable decision is impossible to make on that basis by this committee. On the other hand, saying that the basis of the decision is an allocation of resources between Areas enables the decision to be seen as justifiable, in the sense that it is possible for such a committee to make such a decision (even if they get it wrong sometimes), but will offend those people who think the allocation should be on merit.

3. The membership of a committee and the roles of participants are also part of the justification of its decisions. If the basis of decision is allocation of resources and the roles of participants "representatives" of groups, is the representation evenly balanced? Is it an equal contest? If the basis of the decision is specialist knowledge, are participants sufficiently well informed, both through their own knowledge and the information provided, to make this decision?

4. Representative status cannot be shaken off at will. The expectation of interested observers that you will represent their

interests (which you are seen to share) results in pressure to be partisan, even if you are yourself prepared to give up an opportunity of advantage to your own group for the sake of some more global consideration.

5. Where open information about a committee and its deliberations is not available, people will make inferences about the bases of its decision-making from what they know of its members and also from its previous decisions on the same issue. So its decision rules will be inferred from previous decisions and people will act accordingly in trying to influence the committee in their favour. Disatisfaction will result when the rules do not appear to be consistent between one decision and the next over the same issue.

6. Participants in the committee may find that uncertainty or lack of consensus about the criteria to be applied in making a decision provides them with both political resources and also the danger of attack by others. Being able to justify the use of the criteria most helpful to your own cause therefore becomes important. Chance can also play a part in swinging a decision in your favour, as when you just happen to be first on the agenda and this turns out to be crucial in obtaining what you want.

7. While ambiguity of procedures, roles and rules may be of use to committee members they can cause confusion and disatisfaction to onlookers who have an interest in decision outcomes.

8. Where a committee is regarded as private, this can be used as a political resource by disgruntled participants who can threaten to make its deliberations public. This is particularly the case where

members attend as of right and presumably therefore cannot be "voted off" the committee.

9. In group decision-making some method for proceeding to a conclusion has to be followed, and this method structures the decision-making process. It is possible that being able to pre-structure a decision for a group confers power on whoever does it to control the outcome. A committee chairman is in a good position to try to establish a procedure whereby he or she can pre-structure the decision, but is likely to be vigorously opposed in this by group members who perceive the chairman to be biased against their interests, and would not want to see this bias permanently built into the decision-making procedure, whether formally or by "custom and practice". If the chairman fails to establish this right for the chair, it is open for committee members to attempt to seize it for themselves when they have the opportunity. This is one of the ways in which the procedure of decision-making can itself become a political issue.

10. People's perceptions of group decision-making processes can be influenced by their ways of thinking in other fields. They can also be misled by apparent similarities between committees and fail to notice important differences, such as the effect of a committee membership which changes fairly frequently vis a vis a stable membership. It makes a difference who is on the committee, particularly when it is constrained by few formal rules. "The RFC" is not necessarily the same committee every time it meets.

11. People's behaviour in a committee may be affected by events in other committees with the same membership.

(iii) Area Committees. According to informants' statements, the University Research Fund procedure requires the Area Committees to put forward their list of priorities for URF awards to the VCAC, which then determines who gets what. By contrast, the Equipment Fund is allocated, on the basis of a standard formula, to each Area, which then has to decide how to divide it between the Schools. The demands for Research Funds "bubble up" through a series of filters from the lecturers to the top, whereas the Equipment Fund flows down from the UGC via the VCAC and is divided at every stage until the allocations reach groups and individuals within Schools.

Each Area Committee adopts its own procedure for prioritising the applications to the Research Fund, and political processes differ in the three Areas. In all three Areas, applications are received by Heads of Schools, who are as of right members of the Area Committee. In Technology I was told that a referee from within the Area and one from outside it (but in a related discipline) are asked to prioritise the applications, and their decision is not questioned by the Area Committee. In the Arts Area, grading is also done across the Area by a referee from within the Area, but this can, in theory at any rate, be adjusted by the committee. The Area Committee decides on the overall priority - i.e. just which grade A applications should be at the top of the list. In Science, a draft ranking across the Area is done by the Area Chairman, the applications having been refereed by Professors in relevant fields, and this ranking is discussed and a final version agreed by the Area Committee.(6) It seems clear from these procedures that the Technology Area Committee has the least power of decision over the Research

Fund applications.[5] According to informants, in none of the Area Committees is the academic content of the applications discussed, but where applications are discussed at all, it is over questions of whether applicants are younger members of staff, or which School's turn is it to be first on the list, or what the VCAC's criteria are likely to be.

In two of the three Areas, it was claimed that no attempt was made to allocate the priorities for applications fairly across the Schools. "You need high quality applications to put forward to the VCAC" (in spite of the fact that the VCAC appears not to consider the content of applications). On the other hand, in one of these Areas where it was said that no attempt was made at fair distribution, it was also said that, "At the meeting Heads of Schools are present. All know the situation in the Schools. It becomes a personal thing. The chances of imbalance between Schools are small. Taking one year with another each has a fair crack of the whip".[7] This suggests that although no overt, official attempt at fair distribution is made, there is perceived an informal process by which this distribution is arrived at. However, it should be said that the perception of a fair outcome is not universally shared by members of the Applicants group, nor by some members of the Deciders group who are not on the Committee.

In the third Area it was clear that a deliberate attempt was made to give each School an opportunity to gain Research Fund Awards by rotating the School priorities so that each year a different School's "A" graded applications would appear at the top of the Area priority

list. But in this Area, too, members of the Applicants group could be found who did not regard the system as fair.

The importance of the Area structure as such is seen differently by different people. One person did not see the Area as impinging much on his own concerns: "I am not really aware of the Area level. It is way above my head". Another informant doubted its importance to most people. "There is probably more control within the Schools than most people realise. Many people stay within their School and are not interested in cutting across Schools, so for most people in their everyday work, the Areas are not very powerful"(2). However, he went on to say that at a certain level the Areas are powerful in that any money coming into the Area is split by the Area Committee, and that they also decide priorities on appointments.

Another informant was in no doubt about the importance of the Area because of its function in allocating resources, particularly because he did not believe the allocation was fair. "The Area is very important to us. We don't get as much from it as we should in relation to our size and the amount of work done". Another informant from the same Area but in a different School had the impression that his School was doing better now than in the past but could not be certain. "I have never broken down the figures to find out who gets what." This suggests that he felt the information was available to him should he want to know, but also that inequality for his School was no longer a major issue to him at least(10).

Unfairness was put down by some informants to the imbalance in the representation of the various Schools in the Area Committee, where

each School has one voice, regardless of size. One informant who had a "vague feeling" that the imbalance in representation was detrimental said he couldn't be sure what effect it has because he did not know who was on the Committee or who made the decisions.(1) This suggests a perception that who is on the Committee, and whether the Committee really makes decisions are important factors in deciding on the implications of a particular structure. However, this question of representation was said in one Area to be a "politically contentious point", and was a theme which recurred in data from that Area.

Two examples show how, in different ways, representation of particular disciplines on an Area Committee can become an issue. In the first case, the subject Group which felt aggrieved was large, and larger than one of the Schools in the same Area, but was not directly represented because it was not a School. It was felt therefore that the full importance of the Group and its needs was not made sufficiently apparent in Area meetings. By contrast, another, small, School felt itself to be in a weak position because its discipline differed very considerably from the rest of the Area. Although it was directly represented, its needs were not understood by other members of the Committee. It was suggested that without the backing of a large School behind you, you do not carry sufficient weight in the meeting. "At the Area Committee we are not backed by strong support of people who know what subjects like ours are all about, whereas other professors go into the meeting with this support."(3)

The comment that the Area Committee is "that mysterious body with no legal status" and another that "the prime concern of our Area

Committee is for each member to fight for the interests of his own School, not to benefit the Area as a whole. I am cynical about the Area Committee for that reason", cast doubt on the perceived legitimacy of the Area Committees. The Committees were also seen as being set up for administrative convenience "probably good for the VC and Mawditt, since it simplifies the administration - they only have three people to deal with" and also as a tactical ploy on the VC's part "... it is simply a way of enabling the VC to avoid talking to us directly"[4][9].

Being Area Chairman gives you a place on the VCAC, but there was a suggestion that this was not necessarily welcomed. "You hear people saying they must decide who's going to be Chairman next, and they hope it's not them"[3].

The question also arose as to whether the Areas each received their fair share of resources. One informant, who was on a Board of Studies and therefore received Area Committee papers, said that he had no information on which to assess the balance between the Areas, since although he had information about his own Area, he knew nothing of the other two. Another informant on the other hand was quite clear about the situation. "There is too much Social Science. It is not useful", suggesting that the Arts and Social Science Area should have less of the cake. A similar view was shared by another informant who thought that Technology and Science should be treated as equal partners, with Arts as less than equal, and was not happy that the Arts Area should have been given an equal number of Research Fund Studentships - Cinderella should not be allowed to go to the ball.

It should perhaps be noted here that people were able to form an impression of how resources were divided, without having any firm evidence, as suggested by the statement, "I think engineering and science get the bulk of the studentships. That's my impression though I have no figures."(8)(10)(11)

INFERENCES

1. In setting up a structure, some people become excluded from decision-making processes in which they feel they ought to take part. Such people may become disatisfied with this situation, even if there is no firm evidence that they lose out as a result.

2. The perceived importance of a committee depends upon the issues it discusses, as these are important to the perceiver at a particular time. So, for most day-to-day purposes a committee may have no importance and impinge very little on the lives of individuals. It may therefore only be perceived as powerful as it comes to deal with a matter of importance to the perceiver at that time (which may be never).

3. The power of a participant in a committee depends on the external structures which provide the committee's context, and which affect the perceptions of committee members, i.e. what they understand and attach value to. The power of a group external to a committee, on the other hand, depends on what their representative at the committee understands and attaches value to.

4. The setting up of a structure can be seen as a political act, designed to advantage a particular individual or group setting it up.

5. A variety of procedures may be adopted by different groups to deal with the same type of decision, some of these procedures giving more power to individuals and other more power to groups in decision-making.

6. The question is raised as to what extent being able to pre-structure a decision i.e. to put forward a priority order of applications, which other people are then invited to agree to in a group, confers power on the person who pre-structures the decision.

7. Where values conflict, i.e. "fairness" as against "high quality" the one may be overtly acknowledged (probably whichever is congruent with the prevailing value with which decision-makers wish to be identified) and built into the decision-making process, whereas the other may be allowed to "happen" informally.

8. People may take a view of an appropriate "pecking order" between different decision-making groups which are ostensibly or formally of equal status, and this pecking order may be based on values held by the perceiver, rather than on information about the groups in question or their actual political activities or influence.

9. The legitimacy of a decision-making body may be called in question if some committees in the organisation have legal status and this one does not and if, at the same time, the committee is seen as infringing values held by the perceiver.

10. People may make little effort to find out if they are being fairly treated if they have no reason to suppose that they are being unfairly treated. In these circumstances they may assume that the necessary information would be made available to them should they wish to check on this.

11. The setting up of structures brings with it the need to make decisions about how resources are to be allocated between distinct

groups where the grounds for an unequal distribution may be difficult to justify on any demonstrably fair basis. Moreover, the more people become locked into their group in the structure the more difficult it becomes to assess the claims of other groups.

(iv) Boards of Studies. Data about Boards of Studies come primarily from the Applicants group. They showed a variety of perceptions about these School level committees.

There were no statements indicating that Boards of Studies were seen as very powerful in the university, perhaps the strongest being that the Board of Studies was "the governing body of the School". Its power, in so far as it was seen as having any, was largely indirect. For example, it could "filibuster and delay things", or could influence the RFC through the Senate, which receives minutes of Board of Studies meetings, by making "public" statements about the RFC decisions. It was also seen by one informant as being able to limit the power of the Head of School. "Heads of Schools can't push things through unless they get the Board of Studies to agree. It's like President Carter and the Senate." However, another informant said that the Board of Studies meetings were largely "a monologue from the Chair (Head of School). Giving information down and passing information up", which does not suggest much control on that Head of School. However, an informant from another School saw the "monologue" from the Chair in his School as a deliberate manipulation of the Chairman by the participants at the meeting, who usually wanted to avoid raising issues at the Board of Studies. Other informants did not see Boards of Studies as being of much value. They were seen as "not doing anything much" by one informant, and another reported that his last Board of Studies had been cancelled through lack of anything to discuss.(1)(2)

It was pointed out that the Board of Studies was in competition with

other committees and with "the professoriat" for influence, and it was generally seen as being concerned with internal School academic matters, rather than with wider university issues or matters of financial resources.[2] Again the question of representation arose. The constitution of a Board of Studies is such that there is an imbalance across subject groups in representation. It was pointed out that it was possible for some subject groups to go unrepresented, while others had more than one member. However, this did not seem to be such an important issue as representation at Area level, perhaps because the Boards of Studies are not concerned with the allocation of resources. However, that they do have some importance to some people in some situations was suggested by the following comment: "The power of the Board of Studies really lies in the block. A proportion of members are elected so there is not a balance between groups. So a group of people can have the issue all cut and dried before the meeting, and at the meeting they all vote together." This suggests that although some Board of Studies meetings may be seen as monologues or non-events, others have sufficient significance for people to take the trouble to "pack" them and develop a voting strategy.[1][2]

One informant thought that being on a Board of Studies would be useful in providing insight into "how the place works". Another drew a distinction between political activity and being a committee member. "I don't want to get involved in politics. I am on the Board of Studies but this is useful committee experience. Every member of the staff should do their sentence on the Board of Studies." This person clearly did not see being a committee member as being in itself a

political act, an attempt to influence the decision-making process, although he thought that the committee itself had influence.[3]

The discussion of perceptions of the various committees as revealed by the data will be rounded off by noting that opinions about whether power was to be found in official committees or elsewhere were varied. Two examples will illustrate these perceptions:

"I suspect that real power is not in official committees but in the ad hoc gatherings of individuals in smoke-filled rooms", and, by contrast, "The real decision-making process is probably in the committees".[4]

INFERENCES

1. Committees of the same status, purpose and composition can yet be seen as differing in power, perhaps on account of, and resulting in the inter-active style which develops in the committee. The Chairman of one may dominate the committee, but of another may have to negotiate with it. So, the structural opportunities for power are differently used.

2. People do not necessarily see committees as being powerful or important, even when they are themselves involved in them. This appears to be related to perceptions of the importance of the issues dealt with. For example, committees dealing with resources tend to be seen as more important than ones dealing with academic matters. One can surmise that this judgement would be stronger in times of economic scarcity, but when resources are fairly easy to come by, perhaps "academic" issues would be seen as more important than "resource" issues, and the status of the relevant committees therefore change. In this way characteristics of the organisation's environment could affect perceptions of the status of formal committees in the organisation.

3. It is possible to see committee membership as a neutral administrative task for oneself, even when other people in the same committee are perceived as acting politically. This seems to subscribe to the view that in order to behave politically you have to intend to do so, regardless of whether other people make any use of one's a-political behaviour for political purposes of their own.

4. Saying that a committee is only powerful to the extent that it deals with issues perceived by any particular observer as important, raises the question of whether a committee can be said to be "objectively" powerful. Can one say that, regardless of what anyone in the system thinks, a committee "really" does make decisions which have an "important" impact on the organisation's members? It is difficult to see how this question could ever be answered, since one would apparently end up at best with a unanimous, consensus, or majority view of whether it was powerful or not. On the other hand, saying that any committee which is seen as powerful, will be powerful, also presents difficulties, in that people can be misinformed about a committee, for example in thinking that it discusses issues which it does not in fact discuss.

(c) The formation of Groups. Apart from the formal committees, the organisation can be structured through the formation of Groups. Some of these, such as the "professoriat" and the "administration" have already been mentioned. Within the School organisation there are officially designated subject Groups, and grouping of people around subjects of study and teaching would be an expected source of structuring the organisation. People seemed to vary, however, in their perception of the existence of such grouping. For example, someone in the Deciders group commented "maybe it's a team effort with three or four people working on the same topic area. This is especially so in Science... though in the Arts area you can also find a number of people moving in the same direction - separate but connected topics". Another comment, "The student (Research student) becomes part of a team - for example, about eight people - all working on the same project". A member of the Applicants Group, also in Science saw things differently. "We are all in separate disciplines and tend to be one-offs, not related to each other's work. There are very few, if any, teams." Or, "I work on my own", was a comment from the Arts area. In the Technology area too, there were different perceptions about being in groups. From one School, "We work in teams, on major projects. Only one person is one-off". From another, "We all have different research interests, so you might say there are as many groups as people in the School". Another clearly saw himself as working in a group with several other colleagues.(1)(2)(4)

One person commented that a professor was deliberately trying to build a group around a subject interest: "He doesn't positively prohibit people from pursuing their own independent lines of research, but thinks that in order to do research well the focus of attention should be in one direction"[4]. However, another comment was that there was very little collaboration in the university between professors and more junior staff: "Few staff collaborate with senior people." A contrast was drawn with the German system, where a junior member of staff was said to work with a professor until a certain standard of research is reached. However, it was also said that there was collaboration over the running of courses. "The orientation is towards teaching in collaboration rather than research in collaboration."[1][2]

One reason for the absence of groups based on subject interests seems to be that several people are the only specialist in their field of study in the university, or, where there are others in their field, they are not in the same School or the same Area, and therefore do not form a Group[3]. When it comes to matters such as applications for the Research Fund, competition between staff can prevent interaction on this subject. "There is not much discussion between colleagues about applications. I came from a university where it was the norm, but I don't do it here because other people tend not to do it to me. There is an element of competition between staff." It was also suggested that people do not see any particular need to discuss subjects or anything else with their colleagues: "The Schools tend to be rather insulated in the Area - people don't

talk to others - they don't have to and they can keep themselves to themselves". Another comment, "There is a threshold where you can operate by yourself virtually. Within this you can get the things you want...".(3)

Some people felt that there were opportunities for social interaction on an informal basis: "In the SCR the bridge players meet every day, and the snooker group. Then there are the alcoholics who are always found in the bar". "The SCR is a good place for meeting and chatting, playing snooker, hearing what other people think of the Board of Studies they've been in."(4)

But more comments were made pointing out the limitations on this interaction: "You will also find that in the SCR people sit in groups with people of their own School" was a fairly general comment. One person felt that it was not possible to cross the boundary of another group, "If you were to go to the wrong group they would drop dead with shock. They would make it so uncomfortable for you that you wouldn't try it again. They wouldn't talk to you". Another thought the barriers were less formidable, "Hens flock together, white hens and red hens, but I don't think a white hen would be pecked to death if it strayed into a red hens' corner".(3)

One member of the Deciders group said that the fact that the School met at the same time and in the same place for coffee each day was very useful, and was used instead of formal group meetings, "I know where to find people and they me". However, another Decider commented: "I tend not to go to the SCR - I tend not to know people

and therefore I don't talk to them. I have written off that side of things. They are more like amorphous colleagues than people I know".[3][4]

There were also people who saw no point in discussion with others, and preferred not to get involved. "In Science you learn to cut through, do your own work and not bother about the rest of it. Contributions of other staff and of Head of Group would not be useful." A technologist commented, "I don't mind as long as they leave me alone. I don't get involved in the rest of the university". Someone from the Arts area said "I am very narrow minded. I don't think about other parts of the university".[3]

By contrast, one scientist regretted that there was not more discussion across specialisms: "It's a pity we don't meet more people from other Schools, because you can pick up tips by talking to people across disciplines, for example, if you are looking for a method of doing something, someone in another science might have an idea". These differences in view about the value of interaction with other people do not seem to be related to the type of subject, but to the person's preferred way of being in the organisation and/or their experience of interaction with others.[4][6]

This may be related to the perceiver's role in the organisation. The VC for example seemed to be seeing the academic staff as a relatively cohesive group when he said, (in answer to a question about the disincentive effects of people applying for research awards and not getting them) "They ought not to be depressed. Research has increased enormously in the last five years so they

should be very pleased at the amount that is being done." This suggests a view of academic staff with a high level of identification with the university as a whole.[2] An alternative view was suggested by an administrator who said, "Academics are individualists, starting to specialise from the age of fifteen or so, and getting narrower and narrower interests" who "don't want to spend time" on the university as a whole.[3] It may be that the administrator's role, which brings him into closer contact with academics on a day-to-day basis, enables him to be more aware of the individual interests of academics, and the VC, being rather more remote, overestimates the extent to which one academic can offset his or her own feelings of disappointment by contemplating the success of others. The reputation of the university as a whole is clearly of some consequence to academics, as witness the arguments over whether it should be called a "University of Technology" or not, and it is presumably of major importance to the VC, but the data on group formation suggest that for many people identification with the organisation as a whole is not of major importance.[3][4]

One reason suggested for the absence of social interaction was the physical properties of the campus. The distance of the South Building from the rest of the university, including the SCR, was one example. Also the internal arrangements of the buildings themselves were cited as barriers, "You don't meet people even in your own School. The place is built with separate rooms and solid doors and no-one knows you're in". Also, "There is a lack of a social area for talking to each other in the Schools". However, the question was also raised as to whether this is a personal or institutional failure" - is the

absence of social interaction to do with an inadequacy in the individuals themselves, or in the arrangements provided by the institution? (There is here an implication that people ought to interact). Some people included in this study, the administrative assistants, are debarred from using the SCR, so are not able to use it for whatever interaction there is, but make their own arrangements for meetings between them over coffee. Since they are each in a different School this would appear to be the only informal inter-School meeting that takes place. According to informants this particular Group have a common grievance over their salary structure and their coffee meetings have recently been revived after being allowed to lapse for some time.(3)(4)

There were some indications in the data that informants saw the forming of Groups and informal social interactions as having political implications. One example was where a School was said to have adopted a deliberate policy of forming alliances with another group: "Admin has always found us co-operative, pleasant and not 'anti'. This is part of our internal policy". Some alliances might be extremely temporary, as when people combine at a Committee meeting over a particular issue: "X and I gang up against the other group, but sometimes X gets a pay-off from advantages they get, so he is not always on my side". Others may be longer lasting, as when a group of people combined to try to get changes made: "In the past the staff in the School have banded together to try to get some improvement", although this strategy was seen as having failed.(4)(6)

The importance of getting information informally was pointed out by one member of the Deciders Group, "You have to assess how the central body is thinking - which way the VC is thinking. You do this by getting him talking. I'm not trying to extract information unfairly. You can read the signs over the last few years, and ask what did they anticipate?" It is interesting to note that this informant was anxious to be seen as not being manipulative in thus deliberately setting out to find information informally. Another person with no such qualms said, "The SCR is a good place for information. You can arrange to sit next to someone "accidentally" making it look natural, then discuss with them what you want. If you can convince them in fifteen to twenty minutes over lunch or coffee, you have a good chance. Then you put it through the formal system".(4)(6)

The forming of alliances through patronage was also seen as politically valuable, for example, as a means of access to more powerful people: "I always go to my Head of Group if I want anything, who in turn goes to the Head of School if necessary", the Head of Group in this case being the patron of the interviewee. Patrons may also provide information and other resources directly, and the patron-protege group could also be seen as somewhat set apart from the formal university system. This is because patrons may not only have a role in the university but also in an academic field of research and teaching which crosses organisational boundaries. This extra-mural role may be seen as more important to the protege than the university role, particularly when it provides a short cut to resources which the university would provide only through a

laborious process. As one protege put it: "It is too much effort to try to influence the system. I find the easy way round it".[3][4][6]

It should also be emphasised that while some people experienced the level of social interaction as deficient, others seemed quite happy with the present situation. On the question of working in teams generally, or being able to discuss their subject interests with others, people also varied as to whether the absence of these opportunities was felt as something lacking. In one School, where the subject groups did not function except on paper, none of the people I spoke to seemed to find any disadvantage in their absence, as a means of grouping people together. Another informant found the official grouping of subjects actually divided up his subject into fragments, and his ideas about how the subject should progress were being thwarted by this.[5]

Examples also occurred in the data of the failure of people to form alliances or act as a group. In one instance the Chairman of a Committee was prevented from making a strong protest over future resources to be provided for the group. Because the group had failed to develop and keep to a policy about these resources, a decision-maker was able to successfully adopt the strategy of "divide and rule", dealing with group members individually and getting some of them at least to agree with his view.

Another example cited was over the question of the joint purchase of equipment between Schools. It was suggested that Schools could not adopt the practice of clubbing together to buy equipment between

them because "some people wouldn't cough up when it came to it". One professor was said to have refused to pay for the maintenance of an item which it had been agreed would be jointly purchased between his School and another one, now that it had been purchased. In another instance, money had been allocated to a School for the purchase of some equipment which was to be housed in that School but used by other Schools. Once the purchase had been made, other Schools found themselves prevented from using the equipment.(3)(6)

So far I have considered the official grouping into subject groups and the possibilities of informal social interaction across formal boundaries. However, it is clear from the data that people make a large number of other distinctions between people and perceive them as groups accordingly.

The distinction between administrators and academics has already been mentioned. Within the administrative group, there is also the distinction between those who can use the Senior Common Room and those who cannot, and between those who relate directly to the Principal Administrative Officer and those who relate directly to their Head of School. This is roughly a distinction between Area-based and School-based administrators, but the groups are not coterminous with the SCR - non-SCR distinction.

Among the academics there are multifarious fragmentations.
Outsiders/Insiders: Some people appear to others, or regard themselves as more oriented to working outside the university than inside it. It was suggested that by the nature of their subjects "scientists tend to be more academically confined, but technologists of necessity

link with industry". Among the Outsiders are those who spend a lot of their time on research in outside locations, or are very heavily funded by outside bodies, or who are very much involved in consultancy for external clients. Divisions between those who do consultancy and those who do not can be aggravated by jealousy, according to one informant. "There is a certain amount of jealousy about this. They feel that people are not contributing to the university but just feathering their own nest. This is resented." It was suggested that Schools such as Architecture and Management were particularly prone to this criticism. Among the Outsiders too there is a split between "nationals" and "locals", according to one informant.

Researchers/Non-Researchers: This dichotomy was a recurring theme in the data*, and among the Non-Researchers there were those who were seen as particularly student-oriented, emphasising the importance of teaching, and also those who carried out administration within their School. Among the Researchers there were distinctions made between pure and applied, theoretical and experimental, scholarship-based and measurement-based, "real" science and "trade". Being "trade" oriented was a matter for scorn in some people's view but of positive value in others. "Scholarship-based" according to one view meant "the study of past answers". A distinction based on the scale of the work carried out was also made, for example in the Technology

*Perhaps because the data were collected around the Research Fund decision-making process. This makes it difficult to see how strongly people are conscious of this division.

Area, Electronics was seen as being very near to Physics in dealing with very small items, whereas Civil Engineering was seen as dealing with a whole large-scale process.

Apart from these distinctions, other boundaries were drawn between people, which seemed to be largely based on their commitment to the organisation itself, both in time and intensity. One fairly obvious distinction in a social system is between the older and the younger members, and that distinction is made by university members, as will be seen from the criteria listed on page 248. However, distinctions are also made between those people who were members of the organisation before it obtained its Charter as a university, and those who joined later, some of whom would be classified as "older". A distinction was also made between those who are "hard-working and committed", and those who are "mostly not". People who joined the university relatively recently are often seen as representing a change of direction in the organisation, particularly a move towards a greater research orientation, and there is a distinction made between those with new ideas (mostly but not entirely newcomers) and those with "old" ideas. (1)(2)(4)

INFERENCES

1. Large numbers of distinctions can be made between different groups in the organisation, but these may be perceived groups of people who would not recognise themselves as groups. The distinctions made are sometimes value-loaded.

2. The existance of groups, and the basis on which they are formed, is a matter of perception of individuals, presumably based on their experience of being in a group, or excluded from one, and on their vantage point, from which they see or do not see other people in groups. Hence, although the organisation may seem to a researcher to be multifaceted structure (in the light of all the perceptions of individuals taken together) it does not necessarily seem that way to individuals in the organisation, whose "perceptual model" of the organisation may contain just a few groups.

3. A number of factors may prevent the formation of groups:
(a) individuals see no need to interact with others, either to accomplish their tasks, or for emotional reasons - what McClelland would call a need for affiliation.

(b) Norms of behaviour can prevent social interaction, keeping people out of existing groups or preventing groups from forming which might do so otherwise, and also, presumably, confining people to certain groups. These norms are learned by newcomers. Some of these norms may be embodied in formal rules.

(c) The physical context of the organisation may hinder social interaction, as may the way in which people use the physical setting.

(d) It may be perceived that agreements, which might form the basis of an alliance, would not be kept.

4. Groups form around some activity or idea which becomes the raison d'etre of the group. The activity may exist formally as part of the organisation's task, or arise from ideas about how the task should be accomplished. It may also arise informally, as with a recreational activity, from the opportunities and resources provided by the organisation. Groups may also form on the basis of some value, such as a perceived importance of social interaction for its own sake, or because people might learn from each other, or because social interaction improves relationships between groups and facilitates the influencing of one group by another, or it may be valued by an individual as a means of influence. Where the group is formed on the basis of an idea, or value, this may not be clearly defined and it may be difficult to see what needs of participants are being met by the formation of the group.

5. Of all the reasons why groups may be formed by people, some appear to be more highly valued than others in the organisation, which would suggest an organisational norm about the legitimate basis of group formation. The organisation may therefore provide more encouragement to the formation of groups on the basis of organisational tasks than on the basis of ideas which are less easily definable. The organisational norm may also discriminate between values on which groups may be based, by, for example, facilitating interaction between people who have common specialisms but not facilitating it between people whose specialisms differ. Exchange of information on technical

matters may be seen as a more legitimate basis for group formation than the creation of opportunities for influence. The formation of groups against the tide of the organisational norm takes a good deal of effort.

6. The opportunities for social interaction provided by the organisation, the existance of groups and their bases, and the permeability of group boundaries can be seen as having political significance in that they provide or limit access to information and to decision-makers, but this significance may not be perceived by organisation members.

(d) Theoretical implications. In Chapter 2, Section 3, the structural aspects of power were identified as an important theme in the literature, and the inferences in this present section reflect on the nature of the relationships of power to structure.

It seems clear that, on the basis of the participant's comments there is no unequivocal answer to the question of whether it is the structure itself or individuals in the structure who have power (see Chapter 2, Section 3) since some people were able to see Committees as powerful, while others thought that individuals in Committees were. As Dearlove (1973) has noted, it is the actor's perception of the milieu that counts.

The picture is complicated by the differences of people's perceptions of what the structure actually is. Some people may be unaware of parts of the structure perceived by others, and which can be said to affect their fate for good or ill. For example, not knowing that a decision-making committee such as the RFC exists affects what they perceive can be done to influence decisions. It has been noted in the literature that the ignorance of B is a factor in the power of A (see Chapter 2, Section 5) and it is suggested by this research that this ignorance may be of structural boundaries within the organisation which are perceived and reacted to by others. However, it is also suggested that some aspects of structure, especially the informal groupings of individuals, may be difficult to substantiate as "facts". Their existence, or the nature of their boundaries may be in implicit or explicit dispute. The view that structures either have power, or confer power, as suggested in the literature therefore,

has to be qualified to take account of the uncertainty as to whether particular structures really exist or where and how their boundaries are drawn. A further aspect of the relationship between structures and power suggested by this research is that the basis of group formation may depend on organisational values about what groups should be encouraged or discouraged, and this indicates a relationship between structures, values and power, as suggested in Chapter 2. For example, the value may be found in an organisation that forming groups for technical purposes is more acceptable than forming them for the exchange of general information about the organisation, or for social interaction as such. Perceptions of structure are also related to perceptions of power in that a person's view of a structure may be in itself a political one, for example, that the structure is a pyramid shaped hierarchy, or it may be seen as a division of labour, without necessarily implying a differentiation of power. It is also possible for different individuals to perceive the direction of political cause and effect between different parts of a structure as going in opposite directions. This supports Dahl's (1968) contention that the identification of cause and effect in political behaviour is problematic. The reason why this matter has received little attention in the literature (see Chapter 2, Section 6) is perhaps because of the scarcity of empirical studies of power in organisational settings. In the field it is possible to say with equal justification that A causes B's behaviour, and on the contrary that B causes A's. This ambiguity is also reflected in the fact that it is possible for one person to see a part of the structure as powerful, and another to deny this.

It is suggested in Chapter 2, Section 3, that the setting up of structures through the division of labour, and the integrating devices which are a necessary counterpart of this division, provide individuals with opportunities or constraints for political behaviour. It is possible to view the various committees in this study as integrating devices, but it is also clear that there are considerable political subtleties involved in such devices as far as integration is concerned. Politically, one can see integration as being reflected in the representation of different groups within different other groups. So, for example in this study, representation of Schools in the Senate would be a manifestation of political integration. Baldridge (1971) has identified that representation on committees was an important factor in enabling a group in the organisation he studied to secure resources. However, it becomes clear from the present study that there is doubt about what "representation" amounts to. The balance of representation (and therefore the political balance of integration of the structure) is not just a matter of numbers of representatives and constituents, although these are important, but also of their behaviour inside and outside the integrative structure. As has been suggested, people may have their own ground rules for how to behave effectively in committee (what Bailey (1969) would call normative and tactical rules - see Chapter 2, Section 5) which suggests that they see a cause-and-effect pattern which guides their behaviour, whether or not they can be said to be right about it, but also that the uncertainty about cause and effect can be used to justify the pragmatic rules they wish to adopt. For example, do you "cajole and bully" committee members

because you enjoy cajoling and bullying? Whatever people's behaviour and the reasons for it, it is both permitted by and affects the nature of the integrative structure of the organisation. As Bailey (1969) and Dalton (1959) have suggested, the opportunity for innovative political behaviour is greatest when normative rules are few or where their effectiveness is uncertain. In this study, the uncertainty about rules was both an opportunity and a threat to committee members. For example, you might assert a rule if it favoured you, but hope that no-one else would if it did not. It was also suggested that an attempt to establish rules which favoured your cause was a possible response to the absence of existing rules - for example, rules about how a committee should proceed. However, such an attempt becomes in itself a politically contentious act if it works to someone else's detriment.

It can be suggested from this research that whether or not a committee member was seen as powerful within the committee, might depend on perceptions of what committee members see as important, and thus representation and hence political integration of the structure is affected by these perceptions. How much influence the group external to the committee has within the committee may also depend on what their representative perceives to be important. For example, is it more important to preserve the confidentiality of proceedings than to oppose another member's demands? The answer to such a question can affect the power of the committee member and the fate of the group being represented. This example also puts an additional facet on the relationship between values, structures and power, as discussed in Chapter 2, Sections 3 and 4, in that it

shows how a structural boundary (created by "confidentiality" in this instance) can be used as a political resource by the manipulation of values.

Added to these aspects of the relationship between structures and perceived power, is the suggestion in the data that in some circumstances it may be unclear whether a group member is, or is perceived to be, or ought to be, or can avoid, "representing" another group. This question relates to the idea of political behaviour as involving "conning" or "cheating" people, or playing "games", as raised in Chapter 2, Sections 2 and 4, but also to the suggestion that you can be perceived as acting this way, whether or not you are. It is also to be noted that being a member of a committee does not necessarily mean that one sees membership as a political act in itself, regardless of the possibility that one's membership may be used politically by others. This may indicate a clash of values between a distaste for acting politically, and doing something one likes doing - being a committee member.

The research suggests that in addition to factors which encourage group formation, both formal and informal, there are those which prevent it. Reforming of relationships between individuals and groups may be discouraged, by perceived facades, or risks of agreements not being kept, or by competition, or by the physical properties of the organisation, such as the distribution of buildings. It can be said that the culture of the organisation, including the values of individuals and norms of behaviour within and between groups, which affect people's experience and

interpretation of interactions with others, encourages the formation of some groups and discourages others, thereby helping or hindering social interaction, the forming of alliances and the exchange of information. These processes of group formation or prevention can therefore be suggested to have political significance, both in their impact on "the ignorance of B" (see Chapter 2, Section 5) and the opportunities available for political tactics (see Chapter 2, Section 4).

The data also suggested that perceptions of structure can affect perceptions of the legitimacy of decisions made within structural groups, such as committees. From the perceiver's point of view the committee may consist of the "wrong" representatives to make an adequate decision on a particular issue. Moreover, if the basis for one committee's existence is legal - for example, it is set up by statute with statutory powers - people may be more inclined to regard it as legitimate as a decision-making body than a group which is "merely" set up by the administration or by informal processes. People may differ as to which basis of legitimacy they will accept, as suggested in Chapter 2, Section 4. However, it was shown in this research that people could see the non-statutory groups as more powerful than the statutory ones, (Senate, Board of Studies) which suggests that legitimacy based on external authority does not necessarily confer political advantage within the organisation, if the scope of that legitimacy does not include issues considered important by the perceiver.

The next section will return to the descriptive analysis.

3. Powerful people

The data reveal information about the perceptions informants have of the political actions, attitudes and situations of other people, whether they be individuals or groups.

(a) The Vice Chancellor. If there is one powerful individual in the university, one might suppose that the Vice Chancellor would be that person, so it is interesting to see what perceptions informants had about him from a political point of view.

The data show that people relate their perceptions of the VC (and, indeed other aspects of the organisation) to the history of the organisation as they experienced it, and to their experience of other organisations elsewhere. It was mentioned to me several times that the VC took over from a predecessor who seems to have been considered abrasive and threatening - "Rotherham the Ruthless" - who ran the university as though it were an industrial company. People who have been in the university for some time therefore tend to compare the two VC's, but some newcomers compare him with other VC's they have known at other universities. Some people have roles which bring them into working contact with the VC - especially some people in the Deciders group - but others, especially in the Applicants group may have no contact with him at all.(5)

Perceptions in the Deciders group about the VC's power are mixed. He is seen as "having great influence on the decision" (over the URF awards) but also as not being able to get his own way always. On the other hand, he in turn is not easy to influence, "He is easy to talk to but you can't influence him".(1) He is seen as "very

powerful" especially since he can "wait and do things in the vacation if it is that urgent for him to get his way, under vacation powers in the summer". A "powerful persuader and a strong leader", but 'hot putting pressure on people". He is also seen as a "fixer", trying to lobby support for his view before meetings, and "packing" committees, for example for the appointment of the new Chancellor. He is also seen as identifying where Schools are divided in their views on an issue and using that fact for his own purposes, which suggests a certain political astuteness.(5)

He is said to be 'afraid of the Senate - not that he shivers in his shoes, but he is concerned that the business is carried through. He wants to see that everyone gets a fair crack of the whip, because there is a considerable danger of the outcome if they don't". He was also said to "manipulate the Senate" which suggests a somewhat different orientation, in that the emphasis of causality shifts from the VC responding to a political situation which governs his behaviour, to a view that the VC governs the behaviour of the Senate. (It would, of course, be possible to suggest that both were true). Another comment which seems also to cast the VC in the role of manipulator was "people who decide academic priorities have power. Especially the VC, but he has to carry the staff with him. So, you single out the opposition and isolate it". One informant, however, expressed uncertainty about whether the VC was powerful, "I <u>think</u> so, I <u>assume</u> so".(2)(6)

It was pointed out to me that some people had more contact with the VC than others because of their particular roles in the organisation, and also that being geographically nearer to the VC's office was an

advantage in having an opportunity to influence him. People who held the relevant offices close to the VC when he was a newcomer to the organisation were also, it was suggested, in a particularly good position to influence him, because he would be dependent on their knowledge of the system.(4)

Among both groups, the VC is not seen as neutral, in that "he has an agenda of his own". This fact may be seen as an advantage or a disadvantage to other people. In the deciders group it was pointed out that the present administrative structure was set up by the VC's predecessor who saw the administrators as his henchmen, and this in turn led to arguments about who was running the university, the administrators or the academics. This theme recurrs in the data and one person suggested that "perhaps the VC is too closely associated with the administrators". Another possibility for partisanship is to side with one academic subject or area rather than another, and there were several comments to this effect. Among the Deciders it was said that "the VC has a hard mind but tries to understand other people's disciplines. Other VC's are very bigotted at the core in favour of their own disciplines" (the assumption being that this one is not).(5) But also by another interviewee that "there is a lot of lobbying between the Science area people and the VC" and he is suspected of colluding with the Science area. Another Decider commented that "the VC has great influence on the URF decisions" and that "he is biassed in favour of Science".(3)

One variation on this view should be mentioned. This was the comment that Technology was unfairly treated and Science favoured,

but this was laid at the door of the VCAC, not the VC himself, suggesting that it is the committee which has the power to follow its biasses.

In the Applicants group, those who had any view of the VC's power and their own ability to influence him, gave mixed reports: "the VC is very accessible, but that doesn't mean he would necessarily listen". "The VC is around and you can talk to him. He might discuss things in a general way, but would probably route things back through the Head of School." One person perceived a change in the VC's approachability: "The VC has now decided that on any important matter he won't discuss it informally with a person, say in the Senior Common Room, because he has found himself being misrepresented by people. So with an important matter he asks people to put it through the more formal channels". Another comment raised doubt about the VC's power, "I am not sure that the VC has got a grip on the university yet" - the expectation being that he would eventually get a grip on it, and perhaps ought to, a perception not shared by one member of the Decider group, who thought it would be a pity if the VC <u>did</u> exercise a high degree of control over people in the organisation.(1)(2)(5)

Among the Applicants there were several comments to the effect that the VC is antagonistic to the Social Sciences, or to Sociology in particular. "The VC has been to the department and told the sociologists that he couldn't see any point in what they were doing". It was also suggested that he avoids talking to the Social Science group in the Senior Common Room, "The Social Science people tend to

sit together in the SCR over coffee, and the VC never visits our corner" (although he is perceived as visiting other groups). Another informant suggested that this distance was mutually kept - the Social Science group making no attempt to talk to the VC.

The idea that the VC is pro-science was not supported by one scientist, mainly because he was "so remote". "He's a pure scientist and doesn't understand the applied approach". It was felt that it would be a mistake to try to turn Bath into "the Imperial College of the West Country" (seen as part of the VC's agenda) because "a lot of people joined it (Bath) in the beginning because of its new ideas, and it would be a pity if that were all destroyed and it became like everywhere else - it could be dangerous too." In other words, the VC is not seen by this informant as being in favour of the right kind of science or scientific institution, and therefore not necessarily benefiting this interviewee. By contrast, a technologist felt that the VC's being a scientist was a positive benefit "the VC is a scientist so he takes a balanced view of the world".(3)(6)

One of the priorities of the university at present was said by several people in the Deciders group to be to increase the amount of research done, and the VC is seen as making a special effort in that direction. This is an advantage to people who want to do research, (and most of the people in this study said they were interested in research) but it was also seen as a disadvantage by those who felt that they lost out as a result. One comment was that the VC didn't have much effect on their group, except that they had lost rooms in the last two years because of the emphasis he has placed on research.(2)

The staffing of the university was said to be very much the VC's personal decision, and his preferences are seen as an advantage by some people and a disadvantage by others. A new member of staff in the decision making Group commented that having been selected by the VC "is in my favour" (rather than being already in post when the VC was appointed). On the other hand, one example of the VC's anti Social Science bias was cited as his having "frozen posts in Social Science when posts are not frozen in other areas"[2][3]. I was also informed that he is technically not in a position to discriminate in this way over frozen posts, which does not, of course, alter the fact that he is <u>seen</u> as being able to do so.

From the data one can say that the VC is not seen as all-powerful, not an "Ogre", to be "human" and approachable on a personal level, but also able to project his own biasses onto the system, and adopting manipulative strategies to get support for his wishes. It should also be said that his wishes, for example to favour science and to encourage research, are not necessarily out of keeping with other people's in the organisation. His perceived attitudes and priorities, therefore, are seen as a positive advantage to some people and a threat to others, but these advantages and threats are modified by the perception that the VC does not fully control events in the organisation, although he may strongly influence them. It has also to be remembered that the VC is seen as having little impact either way on the daily lives of some organisation members[5].

INFERENCES

1. Having access to the Head of an organisation through informal social interaction provides the opportunity for influence, but the influence may not be forthcoming. A person may be perceived as not susceptible to influence because the reverse is true. He or she may, of course, have already made a decision and be able to refuse to change it, but it may also be that the person is not able to make a decision without the agreement of others, but be perceived by would-be persuaders to have this power. The person therefore avoids making any commitment, but this may be seen by others as not being susceptible to influence.

2. When a leader of an organisation has plans for changing the direction an organisation should take, but cannot rely solely on authority to carry them out, the creating of opposition, particularly among powerful organisation members must be avoided. Those who stand to gain by the new direction will of course support it, and if these are the stronger groups, the opposition can be ignored, particularly in arenas which are not public. Public arenas are probably the most politically dangerous places for such leaders, especially when they are newly appointed. The kinds of behaviour which the leader in such circumstances adopts may be seen variously as taking steps to sound out support, i.e. indicative of the limitations of the leader's power, or as deliberate manipulations, indicating the political canniness and strength of the leader.

3. Where the Head of an organisation is seen to have, by definition, a greater understanding of one part of the organisation's work than

another, this in itself alters perceptions of the power balance between groups. Subsequent actions of the leader will be scanned for confirmation of this perception. "Out-group" individuals are likely to take a more jaundiced view of the leader's actions than "in-group" people would of the same actions. However, this tendency should not obscure the possibility that some "out-group" people will not see themselves as disadvantaged, either through a cognitive failure to perceive the implications of the leader's appointment, or through the use of denial as an ego-defence, or because they lack the necessary paranoia. Similarly, some in-group members may, because they are able to perceive the leader with a more sharply critical eye, not see the advantage to their own interests as being so great as would at first glance appear.

4. When a leader of an organisation is newly appointed, the early stages of the appointment provide an opportunity for people in closely related roles to increase their power, through the new appointee's dependence on them. There is a danger of the leader's being unwittingly "captured" by one or other group in the organisation, through this process.

5. People's perceptions and evaluations of a leader will depend on their experience of others who have held the same role, either in the same or in similar organisations. They will also depend on the extent to which people come into contact with the leader or are directly affected by his or her actions, and on the evaluator's own values, that is, the criteria they adopt in assessing the leader's actions. This in turn reflects their values about whether some people ought to have more power than others. For example, a belief

in "strong" leadership, i.e. that the leader ought to "get to grip" on the organisation, suggests the view that the leader ought to have a high degree of power.

6. The "cause and effect" view of human action is time-bound in that it suggests a sequence of events, but this seems to be inadequate for explaining human behaviour. The fact that different people can justify interpretations of the relationship between VC and Senate which are largely contradictory suggests that both interpretations may be true. The participants in an interactive process can be said to affect and react to each other simultaneously, not sequentially, since each is in the other's field of perception in making the decision to act.

(b) The Principal Administrative Officer. Another person who was singled out as being powerful was the Principal Administrative Officer, usually referred to by his surname, "Mawditt". The basis of Mawditt's power was variously perceived by different people, and some were not clear why he was powerful, but felt that he was. The most often given reason was that he was very competent at dealing with the finances of the university. "I have a feeling that Mawditt is strong and powerful. He is a very capable financial manager, and finance is so important". Another interviewee in the Decider group who thought Mawditt had power, felt it had to do with his being able to control the finances of the university. However, he did not feel it was quite true to say that his power rested solely on his reputation for being a good financial manager, but was more to do with his role in relation to the Finance and General Purposes Committee (FGPC). He also said that if they go to Mawditt to ask for funds he can say yes or no in the light of his view of the overall budget, and perhaps his power lay in the fact that he was the only one with this overview (the VC being seen as not getting involved in this detail). The feeling seemed to be that Mawditt in some way controls the finances, even though it is the committee which decides who gets what.(1)(2) It was suggested that Mawditt can make decisions to use money without anyone's blessing "except the VCAC". It was agreed that he must have a good argument supporting his case if challenged, "but the main thing is not to be challenged". Another interviewee in the Decider group suggested that Mawditt's role in putting forward financial priorities to be dealt with by the FGPC gave him power, but another informant (a committee member) pointed out that this committee was "not a

rubber stamp" and that they ask for justification of the figures. However, there was also overlapping membership of the FGPC and the VCAC, as my informant and the VC and Mawditt and the Registrar were all on both committees. It is not clear, however, to what extent this works in Mawditt's favour, although having the VC on his side in both committees would possibly be an advantage. (2)(5)

Another perception was that Mawditt "can influence the finances on marginal sums. He can find £1,000 for a job if you ask him to - he has to report this to the Finance Committee and they could object if they don't like it. He can also influence the spending of larger sums by putting a good case".

It appears to be difficult for some people to check out what Mawditt puts forward in making his case, in any detail. For example, one informant said that Mawditt had given a figure for the available Research Fund money "but I think there is more". This indicates a perception that Mawditt has some leeway in the figures he presents, but this seemed to be regarded as a fact of life rather than a major issue. (2)(8)

Two instances were quoted of Mawditt being able to make decisions on his own initiative. "I mentioned a budget problem to Mawditt and he just changed it. He apparently has the power to do that without consulting anyone. However, someone in Science heard of it and was angry that it had happened." "I needed some money for the department and went to see Mawditt and at a stroke he produced more money." (8)(7)

Among the Applicants group, who seem to have little or no contact

with Mawditt, he was also perceived as being powerful. "Mawditt I have never spoken to. I suspect he has a lot of power. He has a priviledged car-parking space. He has weathered the departure of a pro-Mawditt VC and emerged with power unimpared." Also he was seen as closely related to the VC. "The university is run around departments reporting to senior administration - the VC and Mawditt... Mawditt is the commercial manager and has a say in the financial control... I think Mawditt is very powerful."(1)(5)

It was also suggested that Mawditt has too much power: "The administrators have too much power. They make decisions to which they are not entitled. When we were recruiting new staff and had decided who we wanted we had to go and ask Mawditt about it. As though asking his permission rather than just telling him and asking him to arrange it". But the added comment "perhaps it is just the way people appear to be behaving", suggests that some uncertainty was perceived as to whether Mawditt was "really" being asked for permission, or in fact being told, the words and behaviour signifying something different to the participants than to an observer. However, the interviewee was quite sure that Mawditt had "a lot of power over the finances and is very involved in investment, and he could make money available if he wanted by selling something". Also that Mawditt makes rules about the spending of the UGC equipment fund, "We were given a rule about spending money on equipment and consumables - you can't transfer the funds from one to the other. The UGC told us that they hadn't made this ruling. I am not sure if the profs were involved in it, but I'm sure the rule was made by Mawditt".(3)(4)

On the question of the power of administrators in general, a Decider denied that they had any power, but then appeared to change his mind by saying that they had "the power of initiative and suggestion", adding that "there's a difference between power and authority and power is more important", which I took to mean that although administrators did not have decision-making authority they did have power. This was referred to by my informant as a "civil servant" view of the administrator's role, and perhaps gives an indication of the type of power which Mawditt is seen as having.(10)

Other comments indicated that although Mawditt was seen as powerful, limits on his power were also perceived. In the Deciders group someone commented, "Mawditt actually makes the decisions on equipment himself, although they are supposed to be made by a committee. He doesn't have the same power in relation to research", and from the Applicants group, "Although he's worth lobbying in some respects, he is not worth lobbying on any detailed or academic matter. I think the VC would resist it if Mawditt tried to get involved in academic matters". These comments suggest that Mawditt's power is limited by the issue concerned.

It was also suggested by a Decider that Mawditt's power is limited by the power of other people, and indeed by their political awareness: "He has to be circumspect in the use of his power: (a) if his power begins to rival that of the VC, the VC will destroy him and (b) if his power is seen as a threat to the profs, they will destroy him". This presents a picture of Mawditt, the VC and the profs (all of them?) nicely calculating how far Mawditt can go and being able to "destroy" him if he oversteps some presumably definable mark.(6)(9)

One Decider commented that Mawditt "has a reputation, which I don't think is really deserved, because he doesn't tell people what he is doing enough. He is accused of overstepping his remit".

Another interviewee put Mawditt's power down to personality, "You would expect that the Registrar would be the powerful person in the university, but it is actually Mawditt. He is young and thrusting and is the powerful one. It's a matter of personality. He is very approachable". Another informant however, while agreeing that Mawditt was powerful, did not share the reason, "Mawditt is powerful, though you wouldn't think so to talk to him. I can remember him when he was just an accountant, so perhaps this has coloured my view".(8)

INFERENCES

1. A person can be identified as powerful without the perceiver being clear why the powerful person is so perceived. This is more likely to happen when perceivers have no direct dealings with the powerful person. Where visible signs of status are identified, these will encourage the perception that a person is powerful but the identification of these signs is not a necessary condition for being perceived as powerful. Even those who have direct dealings with a person may be unclear about the exact basis of their perception of that person as powerful. They will be able to offer some good reasons, but not necessarily the complete rationale.

2. A person who has expertise in dealing with what is seen as a major resource of the organisation will be seen as powerful, even though that person's decisions may have to be ratified by others who have the authority and willingness to scrutinise them. Ambiguity about the status of the relevant facts can increase this perception of power, since it creates difficulty in challenging the "expert". The ambiguity may reside in the technical difficulty of establishing what the facts are, including the difficulty of deciding what is important and what is not, and it may therefore be seen that the expert has the opportunity to slant the facts whichever way he or she thinks fit, either through the presentation of information or through the manipulation of the agenda. This may create suspicion in the minds of those who see themselves as disadvantaged by the expert's decisions that they are being unjustly treated, but they cannot challenge the decisions on sufficient grounds to overturn them. Hence the feeling that the expert is powerful, since events are perceived as turning out the way the expert wants.

3. People have ideas about how much power individuals ought to have in relation to other individuals, in accordance with notions of the appropriate pecking order of different groups in the organisation.

4. Power may be more or less apparent than real. What sounds like a request, i.e. is in that form of words, may be intended as an instruction. What is intended as a suggestion may be read as an instruction. Questions arise as to what the receiver hears or reads, how this accords with his or her values about who ought to have power, and whether the political meanings of the interaction are shared by both parties. It is difficult for third parties to know what political meanings the words have for those taking part in the interaction, and the extent to which they are shared. Comments such as "X oversteps his remit" may indicate that the meanings are not shared, or that X is making a bid for power perceived as illegitimate.

5. Structural centrality of a role, that is, having an organisation-wide remit and being unconfined to any particular operational sub-group, is insufficient in itself to confer power. However, when allied to perceived control of a major resource, the political potential of centrality can be realised.

6. The power of the individual may be limited by the issue under consideration, but control of a major resource may make it difficult to corral an expert within boundaries of an area of decision-making seen as appropriate to that expertise. It is difficult to maintain a clear distinction between academic matters and the resourcing decisions to which they are related, the substantive decisions and

the means by which they will be effected being interlinked. It may be seen as necessary to keep watch and be ready to apply sanctions should the expert roam too far afield.

7. A person may be seen as powerful because of the effects of change of scale between the context of the powerful person on the one hand and of the perceiver on the other. Being able to decide to give out £1,000 for a project to a group may seem like a lot of money to that group in relation to their scale of finances, but may be a marginal sum, and therefore not a major decision or a powerful act, to the giver and other perceivers who are accustomed to dealing in much larger sums.

8. The skills of avoiding challenge can be seen as part of an expert's political repertoire, important for maintaining credibility. This issue is rooted in the relationship between the roles of "decision-makers" and "adviser". Through the control of information which is relatively inaccessible to the non-expert, the so-called adviser may so heavily influence the decisions of so-called decision-makers that the boundaries between the two roles begin to be unclear. The demarcations may be further eroded by the practicalities of day-to-day running of the organisation so that it becomes legitimate for advisers to make some decisions on their own. Knowing how far you can step across this boundary without facing serious challenge is a matter of judgement. Identifying where the opposition is and judging whether it can be ignored, or how to deal with it, are important matters, particularly in organisations where there is a rotation of roles so that a person in a relatively weak position

this year may occupy a powerful role next, and where there is a possibility that decision-makers may decide to act in concert against advisers. Having a reputation for a high level of technical expertise helps to maintain support among decision-makers, as does skill in communicating whatever justifications are necessary to establish the legitimacy of actions. The situation is complicated by the variability in people's interpretations of what constitutes having over-stepped the mark, and by the fact that people who have little contact with the expert and may even be mistaken about his or her actions, may nonetheless evaluate the role being played, thus adding to the expert's reputation, for good or ill.

9. People's assessments of political relationships are related to their modes of thinking about social systems in general. For example, perception that people in particular roles act as a group and have a common set of values and a readiness to take concerted action, influences also the perception of the possible political action that can be taken. If you think a coalition exists, this will colour your views of the possible political tactics between the parties.

10. It is possible to see a distinction between "authority" and "power", in which "power" seems to be non-coercive.

(c) Heads of Schools and Heads of Groups. These roles have been singled out as possibly conferring power on their holders and as having implications for other people in their Schools and Groups. Except for one or two Heads of Groups, all these roles are held by professors, and professors as such are seen as a powerful group by some people "There is a club of professors controlling the departments", so the question arises of how these particular roles of Head of School or Group affect their power.

Heads of Schools sit on Area Committees and are also members of Senate. Some disapproval of this system was voiced, and some people compared it unfavourably with the Faculty system found in other universities. For example, a professor who was not Head of School felt that it prevented him from taking part in decision-making. "I am used to the idea of the professor being in charge of the department - he is the one who carries the can." There was a suggestion that the system diminishes the standing of the professorial role - you are not a "real" professor if you are not part of the decision-making process at university level. As one informant commented, "A friend told me I shouldn't take a job where I didn't have a say in what was done"(3).

On the other hand, being Head of School and being on an Area Committee, especially where the Head of School is always the same person*, is seen as an advantage. "Professors A and B were both vociferous when

*In some Schools the role is rotated among professors, but not in others, where there is only one professor.

they first came and found they were only professors and there was no Faculty Board - they wanted things to be much more democratic. However, now they are both Heads of Schools and go to Area meetings they don't want things changed, because they see it puts them in a strong position."(11) There are other professors, however, who see being Head of School as an administrative demand which prevents them concentrating on other work, and there have been cases of people resigning from the role for this reason. Another reason mentioned for not being unduly worried about not being Head of School as a professor, was having enough power already and having access to important committees from other sources, and so not feeling disadvantaged.(1)(4)

Comments about professors in their roles as Heads of Groups or Schools, and especially the latter, suggested perceptions that these powerful figures ought to be benefiting their Schools or Groups, getting them what they want, but that there are conflicts of interest for professors which can prevent this, either because of others roles or subject commitments, or because of their preferred personal style.

Being Head of School is seen as a powerful role by the Applicant group, but this may not be just power being exercised in relation to members of the School, but also in other arenas of the university and outside the university. The power of the Head of School, however, is not always seen as being an advantage to the School. It can be a mixed blessing. For example, one informant who said, "We are fortunate that our Head of School is very fair" (in his treatment of the various groups in the School) also said, "He is

always up at the other building because of his contacts with the VC, and he's always abroad, so we don't get as much attention as one might expect from a Head of School". Another informant seemed to be complaining that the Head of School was too fair - insufficiently biassed in favour of his own School in other roles: "He tends to take a university-wide view when you really want him to be partisan for the School".(4)

In another School, doubts were expressed about the political strategy of the Head of School: "He is not a fighter. He adopts the gently, gently, approach. It is probably better that way. I have a divided mind on this. A few years ago I would have thought that approach correct, but others have been nasty and got what their Schools wanted. It is partly a personal matter... he plays things close to his chest. It is a political strategy as well as part of his personality - when they are in a bad mood, people call him the dour Yorkshireman". Here it is seen that the strategy suits the personal style of the Head of School, but the question is raised as to whether it is really effective from the School's point of view. It is interesting to note here that the low-key approach was seen as effective "a few years ago" when the university had an abrasive VC. With a change of style at the head of the organisation there is the suggestion that the strategy should change in the opposite direction.(8)(9)(14)(17)

When a Head of School has good contacts with the outside world and an external reputation, this is seen as advantageous to the School. For example, "He has a £250,000 grant from (an outside source) and this means three or four staff to help with teaching and to mind the

store, and adds to the strength of the department (sic)". On the other hand, these external commitments can work to the School's disadvantage. Of one Head of School who was reputed to be on twenty committees it was said that he "doesn't attend Area Committees enough and so we lose out. You have to be there making your case for your School... Some people would say he doesn't spend enough time here, but on the other hand he keeps the School up to date". (2)(14)

One Head of School was seen as very coercive. "The Head of School won't discuss the matter with us. He's a real fascist. He told us we were not important enough to discuss it with, so there is nothing we can do. We are powerless." (2)(7)(14)

Heads of Schools usually rotate on a three year basis and each Head of Group who is a professor becomes Head of School in turn. This fact is seen as having certain political consequences. "The Head of School is important when it comes to sharing out money. A Head of Group who is Head of School must feather his own nest while in that role, because he knows it will be difficult to do so when not Head of School." Another comment in similar vein, "When a prof is Head of School he emphasises his own area of interest. This is therefore a self-perpetuating system, because each in turn emphasises their area of interest".

One Decider commented, "There's a lot of personal greed in places like this", and contrasted it with the running of a business where "you've made the money yourself. Then, if a particular Area needs

boosting you boost it, not just think of your own Area". (This plea for a university-wide approach came rather ironically from one who was reputed to spend most of his own effort in the outside world, or within his own School![5])

One way in which professors, whether Heads of Groups or Schools, can adversely affect members of staff was seen by some people as being through the drawing up of timetables. For example, "There is double talk by the profs. They say they recognise that different people are better at somethings than others, but when the crunch comes and they are making up timetables you're expected to do everything. They did start reducing our teaching hours, but they've crept back up again".

However, it was also pointed out that in the present economic climate "we have come to rock bottom of the trend to get more staff and less teaching. There is likely to be more teaching in future, so I could find myself teaching subjects or courses I don't want".

"Bad timetables or being given courses to teach you don't want has happened... This could be for malevolent reasons or because the work has to be done." Also, "He (our Head of Group) believes people should teach what they are competent in and enjoy doing, but in other Groups you can end up teaching something you know nothing about. Prof X thinks there are subjects to be taught so you have to teach them". There are suggestions here that the professors are being in some way devious in the drawing up of timetables, but also that there could be rational explanations for what they do - there is suspicion, but no proof, that the professors could act otherwise if they wished.[7][8]

Heads of Schools and Groups can adversely affect members of staff simply by not doing things, either deliberately or by default. Take for example the statement by one Area Chairman that, "We are sometimes very rude about applications. If a person puts in a bad application it counts against him for promotion", and that "Some Heads of Schools just allow their staff to stick their necks out", that is, they make no attempt to filter the applications or help staff to improve them.(14)

Although promotions are made by an academic staff committee and are a matter of competition across the Schools in an Area, "not on the nod from the professor", nevertheless, professors are seen to act as gatekeepers to promotion, since, "Your Head of Group's view is important for promotion - you don't get promoted if he or she disapproves". Other examples of this preventative power of professors were given. "It's important that the professor gives his backing. If he doesn't like the student (for whom you want a studentship) you are not likely to get anywhere", and this gives the opportunity for the professors to make choices which express their own values. A more direct example of this was indicated by the remark, "The ranking (of Research Fund applications) is done by professors on an individual basis and I could bet which one an individual professor would choose as priority. For example, our professor likes research based on statistical analysis".(7)(14)

Although a professor can act as a patron he can also act as a block, not only through making direct choices but through his own academic reputation. This is a kind of patronage in reverse, as explained by one informant: "It is an advantage if your Head of Group is an expert in your own Area if you want to get money from outside bodies

such as the SRC. My Head of Group is not in my field of work and is therefore unknown in it. If he had a steady reputation in the university it would help... but unfortunately he doesn't." Here a Head of Group is perceived as "useless" because, not only does he not have a reputation in the same field of study which can be used by the staff member, but has no reputation as such which could give him influence in the university and therefore help members of the Group. Tha lack of power of the professor here is seen as a disadvantage.(10)

Heads of Schools and Groups can also block the "normal" means of improving one's position by breaking the chain of effort and reward. Even though an important contingency of the organisation may be to obtain research funds from outside, and those who achieve this may expect some credit for it within the organisation, this pattern may be upset by a particular Head of School or Group. "You are supposed to obtain more clout by getting money from outside, but it doesn't seem to happen like that... we seem to get no help from the people at the top". Even though the outside funds are obtained, this informant felt that they did not receive any extra attention.(10(14)

Another example shows the professors combining together in blocking tactics. "... the Head of this Group is not a professor, and recently they tried to clip the wings of this Group and incorporate its degree in all other degrees. The profs didn't succeed in this... however, there has been a selective ban on recruitment... so this puts the degree in jeopardy from another angle. The profs might just not push hard enough for replacement staff if they want to do away with the degree." This example also hints at the disadvantage, mentioned by other informants, if the Head of Group

is not a professor. "Some Groups have more clout than others" for this reason, since non-professorial Heads of Groups are left out of some decision-making. In some cases, where in the past the Group Head had not been a professor but a professor had now been appointed, this was seen as being an advantage to the Group, particularly for obtaining extra resources.(10)

An example of the way in which interaction between professors can affect the fate of members of the Applicant group was provided by an explanation of the official system for promotions. A report on a likely candidate is made by two people - the Head of School and the Head of Group. Since the Head of School may also be the Head of Group, the opinion of another Group Head may be sought where members of the Head of School's own Group are concerned. This can lead to some bargaining between professors over support for each other's candidates. In this instance, a particular constellation of procedures and structures can lead to political interactions which have consequences for the less powerful.(10)(28)

One or two people I interviewed clearly saw their Head of School as a patron, someone who would benefit them as individuals. Such people showed considerable dependence on their professor. For example, one informant, relatively new to Bath, commented that his professor had been successful in getting studentships in the past, and was relying on him to get a studentship this time also. My informant himself knew little of the decision criteria and procedures, but had not been at any pains to find out about them, being guided entirely by his professor's advice. Another interviewee commented of his Head of Group, "He gives me what I want. He's powerful and I cover half

his research interests, so I get privileged treatment. There are two other people who came here also with the professor. One of these covers the other half of his research interests." The perception here is that the patronage is mutually beneficial. It was not clear in this case what the professor's power was seen as resting on, since it was also said that, "Heads of Schools and professors are not really in control of finance - it has been removed to an administrative level", and "He can't employ another member of staff without getting permission centrally". This informant said he avoided getting involved with the rest of the university and was not able to say who the powerful people were in the system, but nevertheless perceived his Head of Group as powerful. He also said that decisions recently made about technical facilities in the university in which his Group had a particular interest were wrongly made as a result of "managerial incompetence", but did not include his patron in this deprecation.(12)(13)

There were also some perceptions of professors as having power in that they were able to get what they wanted for themselves - as well as benefiting their Groups or Schools. For example, "All the applications to the Group come through the professor and he picks off the best students... He does OK for himself. ...he's done a lot for us, more money, better apparatus, and he's improved the section a great deal since he was appointed".(5) A professor may also be seen as benefiting himself and his Group by being able to deviate from the perceived values of the organisation. It was said that one professor's "values differ from other people's here... in the nature of the research going on and in attitudes to

research". This was seen as a benefit to Group members, but it was also suggested by another informant that this professor needed to be protected for this reason, as though there were some threat involved in being deviant on these issues. It was not clear what the threat was, and perhaps no specific threat was envisaged, but a general loss of advantage or the possibility of becoming an object of attack.(7)(9)

However, another example showed that, although professors may have some freedom to deviate from the cultural norms, they may have to give an outward show of complying.

One professor was said to be of the "traditional type..." whose appointment specifically committed him to a particular policy. "He therefore has to pay lip-service to it, but is not committed. He is not a true convert to the faith, but goes to church on Sundays."(9)(15)

One variant on the theme of the power of professors arising from contact with the outside world was suggested by the following observation of one of the Applicants: "If you have enough clout as a research person you can follow your own groove. If you get a large grant to do research in a special field and get staff etc., they will make you a professor in the end to prevent you from leaving for another university". Interestingly, this process was seen as enabling the person concerned to "opt out of politics" as though being in a position to pursue your own interests and having gained a certain high status in the institution as a result of relations with the outside world enabled you to cease taking part in political activity. Perhaps the perception here is that you no longer need to

expend much effort in getting the institution to give you what you want. However, the way in which you might influence the institution as a result of being in this position is not encompassed by this perception of power.(3) In rather similar vein, a Decider commented: "You have to understand the realities of power in the university. I bring in more money than my salary... I am therefore a source of income. My power position is strong - I could move to another chair at another university at any time. They therefore try to keep me happy here". Another Decider commented: "I don't need this job. Because of my national reputation they need me more than I need them". In these comments it was not clear who "they" were who were thus being influenced.

They also raise the question, mentioned by one informant, of the possibility of a professor having enough leverage to get what he wants from "the university" because of his outside contracts, or money-making ability, but at the same time being "not up to the job" of being a Head of School or Group.(2)

The role of professors in building Groups, or alternatively encouraging individualism has been touched on in the previous section on structure. The power that this role represents was strongly put by one informant who said, "I started the Group and took on people who wanted to pursue my vision. We have conflicts, when I think they are going off at a tangent and not keeping to my vision, and I try to pursuade them". He agreed that what he called his "power of patronage" made such persuasion easier. This aspect of professorial power was also indicated by the remark of someone in the Applicant

group that "Profs have special interests... people who have the same interests as the profs get on". However, there were circumstances in which some people get on in spite of not sharing the same subject interests as their professor. For example, the member of the Applicants group who had been in the university for some time, and for longer than the professor, and had already built up his own reputation sufficiently to be successful in getting research grants from outside sources did not feel at a disadvantage that the relatively new professor did not share his specialism. (7)(12)(15)

One should perhaps also see professors as instruments of the university, particularly of the Vice Chancellor, in bringing about changes of direction, especially through new appointments. The appointment of a professor with a particular background or orientation can be a means of harnessing the power of the professorial role to the preferred policy. In two cases, the advent of a new professor was seen as causing an increase in research: "There used to be very few research students, but with a change of leadership they suddenly took off". The new orientation is not, of course, always welcomed by the existing members of staff of the Group or School. One new professor was said to have "forced a marriage" between two Groups, one of which was described as "like the whites in Rhodesia - they failed to move with the times. They started the School going but have now been overtaken by events". Considerable conflict was generated by this change, but it was also said that a Head of School must have sufficient support within the School in order to make such changes. "He cannot fly a kite against the

school", and "can't push things through unless he gets the Board of Studies to agree". From this point of view in making a new appointment the VC would need to take account of the trend of opinion within the Group and School, in order to bring about change through appointment, but I was not able to find out if he does take account of it.(15)(16)

Being a new professor was perceived as having both advantages and disadvantages from a political point of view. If the new professor is not a Head of School or a member of Senate (which he usually is not), he is debarred from important decision-making activities, as has already been mentioned. He can also be at a disadvantage in not understanding the politics of the organisation when he does take up one of these roles. For example, one informant commented: "X has taken over as Head of School and is new to the game, but he'll act politically when he understands how".(31) However, it was also clear that professors can gain concessions because they are new to the system. One professor commented that he had been given a studentship "as a sop to the new professor", and another informant saw this procedure as overriding the decision-rules: He had questioned the fact that some professors were being given research awards from the Fund, which was intended for inexperienced staff. "The message from the higher powers was that this had been agreed at their appointment, so they (the professors) had to be given them, and that was that."(16)

Perhaps because of their power, professors can be seen as acting politically in the sense of deliberately manipulating events, even

when there seems no evidence that they have done so. For example, I was told that a professor through whom I had obtained access to interviewees, had "channelled the people you can interview towards particular people" although appearing to have provided me with an open list. However, I was not able to find any evidence of his having done so. Professors can also be suspicious of each other's actions when there seems no evidence to justify it. One professor's not being able to see me on a particular day was seen as "a trick" by another, although again I could find no direct evidence of this. It could be that this is simply an example of the difficulty of an outsider in recognising "tricks", but an alternative, and I think more plausible reading in these particular cases, is that some people are perceived to be capable of devious behaviour or trickery, and perhaps have demonstrated it in the past, and that this becomes part of the expectation others have of them.(8)

Data about two professors in particular throw light on the ways in which people can be perceived as being "political" or not. Information about these professors was not deliberately sought, but was volunteered by interviewees.

Professor A. "A very powerful person. He has the natural ability and also the opportunity. Others don't have the same instinct - they have the opportunity through their role but don't exploit it. He gets what he wants. He doesn't usually fail to get his way."

"One of those professors who only take part in the university in so far as they have to, and is not really political. He is more interested in his own research and own School."

"His subject gives him an advantage because it provides knowledge of how to handle committees" ... "He has so many commitments outside that he doesn't always realise the workings of the system inside around here."

(three informants)(31)

Professor B. "I assume he ought to be powerful, he has the ear of people who count, but I'm not sure about his ambitions or how effectively he weilds his power. I think he wants power. He doesn't follow a path with the same consistency and single-mindedness as Professor A. He tends to diffuse his power over a variety of things."

"I wouldn't like to be part of his Group - it's a political set-up."

"He speaks his mind and is a fluent and good persuader. He is said to be influential with the VC. He is also said to be a man of iron underneath the bon homie - if you cross his path you are for it."

"He told me that I had fulfilled the criteria I had set myself, but I am not sure that he would have voiced this opinion in the committee. Political forces may have been at work..." (implying a "U-turn" in opinion for political reasons).

(four informants)(31)

The data about Professor A in these examples seems less consistent than that about Professor B, and one reason for this might be that the latter seemed more in the public eye (within the university). Because of the fragmented nature of the social system, being well known probably requires being a member of several committees and

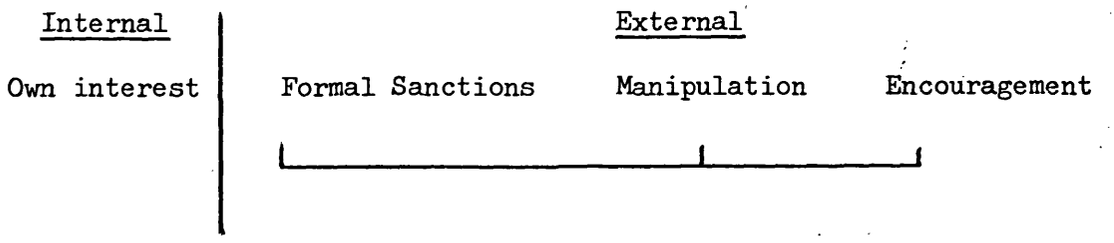
being oriented to the internal workings of the organisation rather than being an "outsider". This provides various audiences who can evaluate the political nature of the person's behaviour and so reputation can grow within the system. "Outsiders" may be regarded as "not political" simply because there has not been the opportunity to observe them acting politically.(17)

It is interesting to note in these observations that people can be seen to have certain political skills, such as being a fluent persuader or being good at dealing with a committee. Also that a person can at the same time be seen as good at dealing with a committee and not understanding the system in which that committee arises. Further, that a person can be perceived by another as "wanting power" although apparently not wanting it for some specific purpose, which suggests that a need for power is seen as a characteristic of his personality.(14)(17)

In considering the perceived power of professors, particularly in their roles as Heads of Schools and Groups, it is relevant to look at the ways in which they see themselves, or are seen as influencing other people over a specific issue, in this case the research activities of the Applicant group. The perceived feelings of the Applicants are included because of the light they throw on whether Applicants are being influenced against their will.

Members of the Applicant group themselves made comments about the pressures on them to do research. The most frequently quoted pressure came from within - the person's own interest. External pressures were also mentioned, and ranged from formal sanctions, through manipulation, to encouragement.

Figure 3



Formal sanctions included the view that even a tenured person could "get the chop" for not fulfilling contractual obligations to do research, and the failure to pass probation or efficiency bars for the same reason. Perceptions of the possibility of such sanctions being applied varied from "You get through (probation) if no-one blocks you" to "It's not a formality... people have left here because they didn't get through their probation". Manipulation refers to such perceptions as "it is expected that you will apply (for the Research Fund) - they can't force you to, but it is not in your interest to refuse". The way in which a Head of School or Group can impose sanctions through your teaching load or through giving or withholding permission to go to conferences also came into this category. "Generally its a question of patronage." The perception that the status of the School itself was affected by the research done also came into this category. The Encouragement category was the most commonly reported of external pressures. One informant said that his Head of School "goes on and on at you", but this was rare and most forms of encouragement ranged from giving positive advice about how to apply for Research awards and the criteria used to distinguish between applications, to simply informing people about the timetable for applications to the URF with no attempt at follow-up. "He doesn't push us to apply. A note comes round but no reminders. It is up to you if you take it up."

One applicant made a distinction between talk and pressure. "They talk about research, but there is not much real pressure to do it. You're expected to publish papers, but some do none." Another distinguished between "pressure" and "encouragement". "I was not under any pressure to apply... but there is general encouragement to put something in if you possibly can." One comment suggested that a distinction should be made between internal pressures based on interest and those based on ambition, and that members of the Applicant group themselves pressurise people. "Some people have grand schemes afoot... others are more political in the career sense - they do what is necessary to get on and are much concerned with their public image. They are the people likely to tread on their research assistants - they have that reputation!" Perhaps one should note here that pressure to do research arises also from competitive behaviour between Applicants, as well as, and perhaps in response to, the pressures applied by Deciders.(23)

Certain pressures were also reported which worked against doing research and in particular against applying for studentships through the URF. The most often quoted was the lack of time to take on a student because of other commitments. In some cases these other commitments were the staff's own research interests already started, or their teaching interests. The comment was also made that, "I would rather do my own research than get someone else to do it", indicating that taking on a student to do research was seen more of a deprivation than a benefit. In some cases, even where people had applied for URF studentships, they reported that they would rather not be successful. It was also pointed out that, since there were no promotion prospects

in the university, career considerations did not operate as an incentive to do research. The lack of space in the school was also given as a reason why research was not done.(19)(21)

Applicants seemed to attach varying amounts of importance to the Research Fund, varying from "would rather not get an award" through "I don't care if I don't get it", to an award being "quite important". One person saw himself as being in a catch 22 situation which a studentship award would not help him out of "I am unable to attract studentships for postgraduate work, and therefore unable to demonstrate that I am capable of doing research". He had a reputation outside the university, but was not sure that anyone inside knew of it so, "For promotion purposes I need to get a research student or two". Another reason given was psychological, "I have managed to rationalise my own position by finding suitable reasons why I don't do a lot of research... so I don't feel bad about it". The distinction that can be drawn between the gesture of putting in a research application to the URF and the wish or interest in doing research is illustrated by the remark: "I don't expect to get it (URF award) and would not be overjoyed if I did, because it would mean extra work. My application is a political gesture to demonstrate that the School is doing research, rather than an application as such". One reason which can be suggested for the somewhat low-key approach to the Fund by the staff is the small number of awards which can be made by comparison with the number of applicants. Some applicants speculated on their chances of being successful, and their speculations ranged from "no chance!" through "a 50-50 chance" to "optimistic". The optimistic ones were relatively new members of staff who seemed to work closely with their professors. In fact they

were not as well informed as they seemed, since one of them saw himself as being "first on the list" (which was not true, although he did get a studentship) and the other one was doomed to disappointment because he had applied for a grant and no grants were awarded. The less optimistic ones had been around for longer. (18)(19)(20)(21)

The perceptions of the Deciders group of the political position of the Applicants group gives indications, not only of Decider perceptions, but also of their actions, since it is usually they who are applying the pressures, if any. One informant among the Deciders was reluctant to say that pressure to do research came from any other source than the person's own interest. "The promotion prospects of staff don't come into it. ... People do research because they are interested". However, later in the conversation he said, "If a person puts in a bad application (to the Research Fund) it counts against him for promotion", and I came away with the impression that although he would like to present an ideal image of autonomous staff disinterestedly researching, he was unable to maintain that image and tell a plausible story at the same time. Another informant was more forthright about the link between research and prospects. "Rewards for researchers, apart from inherent interest in the work, are promotion and career prospects. There is also the chance of jobs outside the university ... they build up a reputation by research." It was pointed out that doing research was linked to getting funds from outside sources, and that people who had not done any research had difficulty in getting these funds, "because they haven't proved themselves". "Nothing succeeds like success. Once you have shown that you can get a grant and use it well you are more

likely to get one from an outside body" - hence the importance of the University Fund. The requirement to do research was said to be part of the contract of employment of all staff, but this was denied by at least one Decider group member, who said that the only contractual requirement was to keep up with one's subject. However, it was said by another informant that the research requirement was "built into the time-table of all staff" and that for new members of staff on probation, doing research was necessary for the confirmation of their appointments. One "hard-line" comment on this subject was, "It counts against people if they don't apply for research grants etc, but there is no kudos in applying unless you succeed". i.e. You get no marks for trying!

These comments suggest that formal sanctions are envisaged as a means of getting staff to comply over particular issues. (18)(21)(22)(23)

Manipulation as a strategy was acknowledged by the comment, "The only thing I can use as a lever with the staff is money, since they ask me for it for projects". However, this was seen as double-edged, "Those who comply are more likely to get funds, but it also works the other way - because they complied they can demand funds from me". (6)(24) Various forms of encouragement were also mentioned which largely tallied with the Applicant group's account, but also included such activities as suggesting to particular individuals that they apply for the URF and even suggesting the particular topic of research. However, it is difficult to see how the line might be drawn between manipulation and encouragement in these latter cases, since direct approaches to individuals may seem to them like offers which can't be refused. In one instance at least it seemed to me that staff were

being directed, however obliquely, in this way.[31]

About the Research Fund in general, there were comments about the interest of the staff in applying for awards. One informant said there was no reluctance to apply in his area unless people were already provided for or had given up - the "old stagers". However, various reasons were suggested by other informants for a reluctance on the part of staff to apply for the Fund. These included: being more interested in teaching; senior staff wanting to spend time on something else; being "feeble" in research; "Can't be bothered"; not being bold enough; lacking confidence. It was suggested that "there's nothing in it for the staff to take on students" and that with little time to spare staff would not be too pleased to get a studentship from the Fund, although they would accept the extra load. Also that, staff who were working on their own PhD theses would feel inhibited about supervising someone else's research.[21]

Rather more general comments about the system for the URF were, in one School that "There's a certain amount of paranoia around here about research funds", suggesting general dissatisfaction. Another professor suggested that people react adversely to failure to get an award (and most people do fail) "You'll get a very biassed and distorted view from people who have applied for funds and been unsuccessful". Another, however, thought that even if people did fail they would still feel they had got something out of applying, in the opportunity to clarify their ideas. One professor seemed unaware of the mystery surrounding the workings of the Research Fund for some

people (see page 244) when he said that staff in his Area were practical people and therefore would not mind the fact that the applications were not judged on academic grounds. There were people in his Area unaware of that fact, but he seemed not to realise this.(25)(26)

One Decider voiced doubts about knowing how his Group members felt about their situation: "It is difficult to say if people are happy. I try to encourage them to tell me by talking to them. They don't complain to me... they feel they should keep on the right side of me".(22)

This last comment indicates in itself an acknowledgement of the informant's own power in relation to members of the Applicant group and was made by a professor who saw himself as powerful in the organisation as a whole, as well as in relation to members of his own Group. This self-perception can be contrasted with that of a professor who felt himself to be excluded from the decision-making process at university level, and said of his Group members, "I doubt if I'm seen as powerful. They probably see me more as a clown". This informant seemed to have an ambivalent attitude to power, in that he criticised the decision-making system for not giving him enough control over his Group, "I'm not in charge", but at the same time, gave as his reason for wanting to be involved in the decision-making process at a higher level: "You would have a chance to hear all shades of the discussion", and "you would get more feeling of belonging to a corporate whole. I'm not wanting it for political reasons, so that I'd know how to influence the system".

His description of how he ran his Group meetings indicated democratic values, for example, "I like to have the maximum approval of the Group", and it may be that the ambivalence arises from a perceived clash between these values and the idea of power and acting politically. He was clearly not above slanting an application for Equipment Funds in such a way as to increase his chances of being successful, "You have to embellish it a bit", but this was also perceived in such a way as not to clash with other values, "It's a game people play, but it isn't false". (3)(7)(30)(31)

One role played by professors in the organisation is to make assessments of other people's work, and this role might be expected to provide them with an opportunity for power in the form of expressing their own values, and having their definitions of what is "good" or "bad" work prevail. Acting as referee for the University Research Fund, either at School or Area level, is one such role. Many of the comments about this role were about the "objectivity" of the assessments, and their fairness. This reflects on the extent to which the personal preferences of the referee are given reign as against some perceived common standards of what constitutes academic excellence. However, there are certain variations of this idea which appeared in the data. For example, it was said of one referee by a member of the Decider group: "He has an eclectic approach and I am sure he would discount the opinions of other people". This suggests that it is a positive benefit that the individual should exercise his own values and standards, since other people's are presumably biassed. It could also indicate however that the referee should not only set aside other people's views but also his own preferences, and exercise some objectively rational judgement. However, the same informant

also said,"I think he would have some sympathy for applications from this School", suggesting that the person concerned could be influenced and might exercise his personal preferences to some extent. The object of this comment considered himself to be biassed in making his assessments, but said that he took deliberate steps to offset this bias. "I am biassed in making my assessment by my own discipline. This has both good and bad effects. It may make me more critical of my own Area... people in other disciplines tend to get off lightly because I don't feel I understand them...." One referee admitted to being "biassed by names", being more likely to give a high grade to someone known to him as "good": "A good person is likely to get a high grade, even if he has only written a few lines, because I know his work." (7)(26)(29)

A referee whose own Group members had not applied for awards also suggested that he might have been biassed in their favour had they done so, and another facing a similar problem had taken steps to be seen to be fair: "I wanted to give (an application by a member of his staff) an A grading, but thought that a bit naughty when the others were not personally known to me". He solved the dilemma between being fair and being seen to be fair in the following ways: "This is where the subtlety comes in. I put in my note about the applications that I felt I must downgrade the candidate to B because he was one of my own staff. I suppose I had done it rather in the hope that it would be upgraded to A by the other referee". It seems unlikely that the other referee would have downgraded an A given by his professorial colleague, but it could have reflected adversely on the professor's reputation had his action in giving an

A grade been interpreted as favouritism, and it seems to have been fear of ill-repute which motivated his political tactic.[26][28][29]

Other informants among the Decider group suggested that irrationality came into the judgements made by professors judging the work of others: "Dr X put in a good application... but got nowhere. It was a red rag to some bulls on the Committee. He had fallen out with some people, perhaps it was a personality problem". Another suggested that the decision about who would get awards was made on the basis of "whim and prejudice".[27]

Comments were made by Deciders about the political position of referees, which appeared to be unknown to Applicants. It was pointed out that it was not easy to get people to act as referees: "There is a constraint on getting referees if there are too many applications. It is a difficult task", and another informant said, "The referees have better things to do with their time". This no doubt is a contributory reason why the Area "feels it should accept the referees decision, having asked them to give guidance", and why another informant considered that the priority given to applications by the Schools "could be reversed by the referees". Power of the referees in this case seems to arise from the fact that they are doing a job other people don't want to do - they have a scarcity value and can therefore make demands in recompense. Or at least, other people may see them as people who should be given power as a compensation for doing jobs which others don't want.[28]

One informant who maintained that "no priority is given to practical research" also commented that referees tend to say in their comments

on applications, "We desperately need this research..." or in other words indicate that the research is useful and urgent. This may indicate that the informant did not realise that in saying this referees may have been acting politically, in that they were homing in on the "useful" criterion* for gaining awards, and emphasising that aspect of applications they particularly wanted to support (for whatever reason). Or it may be that he was not aware that the two statements were to some extent contradictory, and wanted to maintain both positions: that no priority was given to usefulness, and also that usefulness was a criterion for gaining an award. (8)(25)

The referees themselves also indicated perceptions of their own power. One explained that there were constraints: "It is important in a small community to maintain good relations with people. ... it is not possible to downgrade the work of a senior colleague." Another said, "It would be difficult to give a low grading to a professor putting in an application. I am aware of status when giving a grading. It is a pressure".

However, another referee was unconcerned about such matters, saying that he had deliberately given a low priority to an application in a field he knew to be of great interest to one of his professorial colleagues. It was not clear whether he considered that this would not cause ill feeling, or that he did not care if it did. (25)(27)(28)(30)

It should also be noted here that refereeing applications for the URF is not necessarily regarded as an important activity. One member of

*See page 248

a refereeing group said, "It takes a lot of time to prepare an application and we feel that every consideration should be given to the applicants". However, another called the URF procedure "all parish pump stuff", and if one assumes that the importance of an issue colours people's political behaviour, perceptions of importance should be taken into account. However, "importance" can relate to the indirect significance of an event rather than to the event itself. Someone suggested that the VCAC decision which gave equal studentships to all the Areas, rather than giving more to Science and Technology than Arts, represented a change of heart towards the Arts Area. Thus indicating how an event which might not in itself be perceived as of great importance can be seen as a straw in the wind heralding important shifts in political advantage generally.(19)

As might be expected, members of the Applicant group also had their perceptions of the "objectivity" or otherwise of those who were assessing their research applications, and it should be remembered that in many cases Applicants did not know who the referees were. Where Applicants had comments to make about referees, they invariably expressed concern about the validity of their judgements. For example, "It's a subjective matter. Different people would rate a project differently. It depends on the interest of the person rating". "People specialise within a subject and you can't know everything". It was suggested that professors were biassed by ignorance, "There is no-one really appropriate in the university to judge my work" was a fairly typical comment. The applicant who said, "If people in my School cannot really assess my project, even less can the

Area Committee make an assessment on the basis of fact", had perhaps perceived a reality of the refereeing procedure in going on to say, "It can help if you are known to them or if your face fits - these factors are more important I feel than the scientific content".[26][27]

Apart from the perception that the referees do not understand the content of applications, some applicants also referred to other political aspects of the referees' role. For example: "He's on the Committee and also a potential recipient of the Fund himself, so..." It was also suggested that they had a vested interest in ensuring that the awards for funds should go to their own Schools, or that they may be thinking in terms of getting money from particular external sources for which an application might be seen as a pump-priming application. There was also the fear that professors would favour their particular proteges, as shown by the fact that one School set up a Committee to rank applications which excluded professors, "to save having people on the Committee pushing for people they'd guided or who were thinking on the same lines". As one applicant commented, "There was a lot of trouble last year because people didn't think it was fair. It was felt that there was favouritism on the basis of individual influence".

It is interesting to note how the need to have applications assessed by people knowledgeable in the subject and the need to be seen to be fair can be in conflict.[27]

On the whole the data suggest that whereas the Deciders might recognise situational factors making their decisions less objective than they

would like to see, in general they see themselves and each other as making rational judgements in view of the demands and priorities they perceive. Applicants on the other hand are more likely to see referees as in a position to act in their personal interest and to question the legitimacy of their power. The referees are known to the Deciders, mainly being members of that Group, but are little known to Applicants, and there appears to be a norm of behaviour which forbids anyone from discussing an application with those who are refereeing it - seen, not as a formal rule but as something that is "not done".(27)

To summarise the main threads of the data in this section:

Taking up an organisational role, such as Head of School or Head of Group or Referee, when you have professorial status, is one means of gaining power in decision-making in the organisation. However, it is not the only means, and if you obtain power by other means, such as through external sources, these may conflict with the taking up of organisational roles. On the other hand, the structure may debar a professor from a role in decision-making in the organisation and this may be seen as incongruent with professorial status and hence demeaning to that status.(2)(3)

There is not much evidence that Heads of Schools are greatly influenced by members of the School if they do not wish to be, since although School members may make demands on a Head of School, it is still possible for a Head of School to resist those demands and be coercive in dealing with staff. Though this requires a thick skin.(6)(30)

The power of professors in relation to individual School members lies in part in the control they are perceived to have over the fate of individuals, in such matters as promotion, timetabling, and adjudicating bids for resources. Even so, the economic climate is seen as a limitation on the power of professors in these respects. Patronage (and anti-patronage) where they exist are perhaps the strongest political resources of professors, where staff are anxious to gain academic standing through research and publication. Where a professor already has high status in his field, and can commend resources from outside the university, this gives him considerable power in relation to those inside it who seek status and resources in the same field. (2)(12)(13)(14)(18)(21)

Where professors have decision-making roles in the organisation they can be seen as particularly powerful where they appear to be acting together in concert - as the professoriat versus the rest. In this way they can be seen as furthering the interests of professors as such. On the other hand, they are also perceived to have the capacity for furthering their own personal interests, as distinct from anyone else's, and this confers power on them. (4)(10)

Perceptions of the power of professors depends on their visibility within the organisation, and this seems to be related to their preferred means or style of gaining and exercising power. Whereas some professors may be quite clear about their own power, others seem to take a somewhat limited view, based perhaps on somewhat mechanistic views of social processes. For example, money may be seen as a lever, but it is not so in a purely mechanical sense of affecting only that

to which it is specifically applied. Control of money can confer a general aura of power on a person, so that they can be seen as powerful without the perceiver having specific information of that power being exercised.[2][17]

The power of professors can be seen as limited by various factors: their contract with the organisation (whether formal or informal); organisational norms; the reputation which non-professors can build for themselves and which makes them independent of professorial patronage; the various factors which reduce the level of interest either of professors or non-professors in a particular issue including their perceptions of its importance; and the effectiveness of their personal political style in a given situation.[15][16][21][24]

People have to reconcile their perceptions of their own power and their need for power with their values and their need to demonstrate these values in action. For example, for some people it is necessary that academic values, which are seen as emphasising the importance of objectivity and rationality, are seen to prevail. However, maintaining academic values in decision-making can run counter to other values such as the avoidance of conflict, so that an "objective and rational" approach to the substantive issues about which a decision is being made, can be compromised by the political pressures which arise from the interest of other people in the outcome and their possible reaction to it. This compromise can, of course, be designated as itself "rational", in the circumstances.[26]

INFERENCES

1. Aspects of the relationship between professional status (that is, status conferred on a person because of academic achievements) and organisational role are apparent in the data. Where there are important political arenas in the organisation (such as the Area Committees) which consist of people who play roles of organisational leadership in which they represent the interests of groups and where these leadership roles are conferred on people on account of their professional status, high professional status provides access to important political roles but there are also factors which prevent these being taken up. For example, where there are several potential leaders in a Group, because the Group's task requires that they have several members with high professional status, procedures such as the rotation of leadership mean that these powerful organisational roles are only played intermittently by the same individual. Where there are no alternative leaders in a Group, either because people of sufficiently high professional status are not needed for the Group's task, or because the alternatives are unwilling to take up the leadership role, some individuals will have a permanent place in these political arenas, in which others are temporary members. This confers potential advantages on such "permanent" individuals and may also cause the organisation to be perceived as being run by a "clique".

2. A person may acquire high professional status, and thereby a leadership role, through an ability to deal with a critical contingency of the organisation, i.e. for political reasons, rather

than on the basis of an ability to perform the leadership role, either in respect of the Group's task or in important political arenas in the organisation.

3. If professional status is not accompanied by an organisational role perceived as having an appropriate amount of power, the status may be seen as diminished. This shift in perception of status may result from the perceived reaction of a reference group to the discrepancy between status and role.

4. Roles as Group Leader and as organisational member may clash with professional roles. It may be more in the Group Leader's interest to give priority to the professional role, and in so far as this is to the detriment of the Group, the legitimacy of the leadership role will be questioned. However, ambivalence towards the leader will result when the advantages and disadvantages to Group members of the leader's own priorities seem balanced.

5. Values encouraging the preference of the needs of the organisation as a whole over the needs of an individual or Group can be over-ruled by norms of behaviour associated with temporary leadership roles in the Group. These norms may encourage opportunism on behalf of some members of the Group, and once set up are likely to become self-perpetuating. Who will be first to forego the sub-Group's self-interest without any guarantee that the gesture will be reciprocated when another leader takes over?

6. Where a leader is powerful in relation to the organisation and also usually not dependent on the Group, but must on a particular

than on the basis of an ability to perform the leadership role, either in respect of the Group's task or in important political arenas in the organisation.

3. If professional status is not accompanied by an organisational role perceived as having an appropriate amount of power, the status may be seen as diminished. This shift in perception of status may result from the perceived reaction of a reference group to the discrepancy between status and role.

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6. Where a leader is powerful in relation to the organisation and also usually not dependent on the Group, but must on a particular

issue gain the support of Group members, this gives Group members some power in relation to the leader over that issue, but not necessarily over any other.

7. In the absence of task inter-dependence between the leader of a Group and the followers, and where there are few formal rules governing the leader's behaviour, and where the means for applying formal and informal sanctions to the leader are weak, the main constraints on the leader's behaviour must arise from his or her own values. The result is likely to be a considerable diversity in leadership behaviour between one leader and another, and the decisions made and decision-making procedures adopted can be taken as highly expressive of the personal values of such leaders.

8. Where there is uncertainty about the intentions and freedom of choice of powerful people, it is open to the perceiver to make an interpretation of that behaviour, based on whatever evidence the perceiver has and perhaps largely influenced by the perceiver's own preferred way of seeing the world. However, the perceiver may avoid making a decision between explanations but keep various possibilities in mind when considering the behaviour of that person.

9. Behaviour contrary to the prevailing norms of interaction may be seen as dangerous but can be successfully used as a political tactic, which may include pretending to comply. The fact that there <u>is</u> a norm presents an opportunity to use it as a political resource.

10. The more powerful may act as a "block" on the activities of the less powerful by a number of means:

(a) Being incompetent.

(b) Not observing formal or informal rules by which effort and reward are related in the organisation.

(c) Combining against the less powerful.

Informal bargaining between the powerful within the context of particular structures and procedures may affect the fate of the less powerful (for good or ill) in ways of which they may be unaware.

11. It is easier to maintain democratic ideals when you are not yourself in a position of advantage in a power structure.

12. Patronage creates dependency, but people are more inclined to perceive that the proteges depend on the patron than that the patron depends on the proteges. This may leave proteges unaware of their own power, and is particularly likely to occur in situations (as in this case) where the goals of proteges are seen as clear, i.e. to achieve the same status as the patron, but the goals of patrons are less so. Proteges may also be unaware of the extent of their dependence, nor how well or badly their interests are being served by their patron, if they relate to the rest of the organisation only through the patron and avoid other organisational contacts.

13. Having chosen to accept the patronage of another, a protege may also choose to see the patron as powerful and competent regardless of evidence to the contrary. This may be done by blaming

deficiencies on other organisational members rather than on the patron.

14. A person may affect outcomes for another by withholding information or action. X may be unaware that information or action has been withheld by Y, as when a professor could show how an application to the URF might be improved but chooses not to do so. Where the situation may be defined in two different ways (i.e. as a test or as a learning/coaching activity) the withholding of information or action may be seen as legitimate by one party but not by the other. The definition of the more powerful party (i.e. the one who can withhold the information or action and hence affect the outcome for the other) will prevail. Withholding information or action may be a manifestation of personality, rather than a tactic related to pragmatic interests.

15. Some aspects of the role of a "new broom" as a means of change are suggested by the data. Where the Head of an organisation has to make an appointment to a powerful role, this will also present an opportunity to give impetus to the policy direction which the organisation's leader prefers. The more power the leader has in making the appointment (i.e. through not having to consult others or get their agreement) the greater the opportunity to express the leader's own values in making this appointment. However, there are other factors which may work against the use of a new appointment as a means of change. One is the resistance of the Group to be lead by the new appointee to the policy of the organisational leader, and their ability to affect the implementation of this policy, including

their independence from the leader. Moreover, the personal goals of the appointee may not be congruent with the policy in every respect, but this may be unknown to the organisational leader, either through misunderstanding or through deliberate concealment. The extent to which the organisational leader can influence the appointee's action once appointed, or apply sanctions if the perceived "contract" is broken, will also be a factor in the effectiveness of this means of change. Making the appointment from outside the organisation has the advantage of bringing a fresh approach to bear on the organisation's activities, but also the disadvantage that the new leader is largely unaware of the political forces with which he or she has to deal.

16. A person joining an organisation has, for some time, a "threshold" status in that he or she may be formally or informally debarred from taking full advantage of political opportunities - formally because as a newcomer it may be seen as unfair to burden the person with an organisational leadership role, and informally because of the difficulty of understanding the political processes of the social system. However, threshold status can also be an advantage, in that other powerful organisational members may feel obliged to make a favourable impression on the newcomer to confirm that he or she made the right decision in agreeing to join the organisation, so that demands made by the newcomer may be more readily agreed to. Not understanding the political processes of the organisation may also give the newcomer greater freedom of action. For example, not perceiving yourself as a member of an "out-group" may prevent you from seeing constraints which are more imagined than real.

17. Some types of organisational activity, such as behaviour in Committee meetings, are more easily visible to other people and more easily designated as "political" by others. It is on such activities that a reputation for being a politician in the organisation will be more readily based since they are visible and understandable to more people. Others who adopt a low profile may have considerable power in the sense that they get their own way, "even against resistance", but may have little reputation for political behaviour in the organisation, since their activities are not widely known. A low profile strategy may have the disadvantage that the opinions and values of a person not perceived as powerful will carry little weight in the organisation, but have the advantage of not presenting a clear object for attack by others. The low profile approach may enable a person to follow his or her own interests without in any obvious way influencing the organisation as a whole. It is also easier for people to attribute power-seeking personality characteristics to those who involve themselves in highly visible political activity. Whereas some people may advocate the use of one particular style of interaction as politically effective, a perceiver may be in doubt as to whether it is effective or not, which suggests a difficulty in interpreting the outcome of political behaviour.

18. There may be a disjuncture in the mechanism for relating internal incentives to organisational members to meet the external contingencies of the organisation. The rational view of the mechanism is that incentives are offered to organisational members to extend the

use of their abilities and skills beyond existing levels in order to increase the organisation's leverage in obtaining more resources from its environment. The trouble comes when what you have to do to increase the leverage will not readily turn itself into an incentive to organisational members, since an incentive only exists if those to whom it is offered see it as such. In the examples reported here the means of leverage (increasing postgraduate student numbers) may be seen as a disincentive by some organisational members whose personal research interests cannot be met by such means, but whose workloads would be increased by it. Neither is the incentive of improving one's career prospects necessarily effective for some organisational members, since they may perceive that the absence of growth in the organisation's activities and the low staff turnover of relevant posts, will provide few opportunities for career advancement within the organisation or in similar organisations. Other members of the organisation, however, may find the incentives offered to be compatible with their own interests and their perceptions of advancement opportunities. The mechanisms for relating internal incentives to external contingencies may therefore favour some organisational groups and individuals more than others, and be a disincentive to some people.

19. The importance of an issue to an organisational member may not reside in it's substantive content, but in the symbolic significance which may be attached to the organisational member's participation in the decision-making process involved. So, making a bid for resources may be a political gesture to demonstrate conformity to prevailing norms rather than a demand for resources as such.

20. An organisation may narrowly define the achievements for which credit within the organisation will be given, and people whose achievements lies outside that narrow range may feel obliged to take part in an activity which will symbolise their credit-worthiness to the organisation, rather than attempting to widen the range which the organisation will accept.

21. Attempts by powerful people in the organisation to gain compliance to norms considered important may be thwarted by constraints placed on particular individuals or groups by their special circumstances, and also by the ability of individuals to make psychological adjustments which facilitate their deviation from the norm.

22. People in roles generally seen as powerful in the organisation vary in the certainty with which they describe the views and feelings of others. They rarely mention the political difficulties of finding out what other people think. This may be because they are unaware of these difficulties, or because their role requires them to be in touch with the views and feelings of their subordinates and it is therefore difficult for them to express uncertainty on this issue.

23. Of the pressures on individuals to comply with demands of powerful members of the organisation one might expect the formal sanction to be an easily discernible indicator of political cause and effect. For example, that Mr. X did not get what he wanted (e.g.pass the efficiency bar) because he did not produce the required level of output (e.g. published papers). However, considerable doubt can exist

as to whether the sanction really applies, or about its efficiency in bringing about the behaviour. The behaviour may be compatible with avoiding the penalty, but it need not be caused by the existence of the penalty. So, a person may do research because they are interested, rather than through fear of not passing probation, but they avoid the sanction nevertheless.

24. Influence attempts based on inducements should not be seen as uni-directional causation, since offering a reward in exchange for behaviour legitimises demands for the reward, the behaviour having been complied with. B can therefore be said to cause the behaviour of A through having complied with A's demands. However, it would be a mistake to think that this equalises the relative power of A and B, since A may have considerable freedom in the choice of reward to be offered.

25. Where there is some doubt as to the effective influences on the behaviour of others, an individual may adopt a reason most compatible with the image of the organisation he or she prefers, in spite of conflicting evidence.

26. In situations which are seen as calling for complex judgements to be made, people are likely to have ambiguous notions about fairness. On the one hand they may feel the need to advocate "objectivity" but on the other recognise that as this "objectivity" must reside in the mind of someone, it cannot really exist. As a result, "being unbiassed" may mean not being seriously open to challenge with the likelihood of the judgement being over-ruled and/or not being

biassed against me. Maintaining faith in one's own objectivity may involve seeing those who disagree with a decision as "biassed".

27. Procedures and norms of behaviour may make it more difficult to challenge those who make complex judgements, so that they are shielded against having to justify their actions. However, this will not automatically shield their judgements from suspicion. People who have no information on which to assess the substantive arguments will base their assessment of the fairness of the judgements on what they can see. If they see the substantive issues as being based on exclusive knowledge to which they do not consider that the judge is a party (i.e. it requires specialist knowledge to fully understand), or if they see that the judge is so placed in the organisational structure as to be likely to be subject to political influences, the judgement will be suspected as unfair. Alternatively, the judge may be seen as exercising his or her own whims.

28. One factor which can affect the decisions made by a judge is his or her interpretation of the behaviour of colleagues and prediction of how they will react to a particular decision. So, it might be assumed that a decision with which they do not agree will spoil relationships over other issues. Clearly, the reactions of those who can adversely affect the judge will be more important than of those who cannot, either because they do not know who the judge is, or because they have no power in relation to the judge. These two factors, the predictions about the reactions of the powerful and the visibility of the judge to such persons, can bias judgements in favour of powerful members of the organisation. Where the judge has no

fear that harmful effects will ensue in relations with powerful people, constraint on decision-making is reduced.

29. Some judges reported taking steps to off-set their biasses, for example, in favouring their own subjects or members of their own staff. As well as not wanting to upset powerful colleagues, they also wanted to be seen to be fair. This suggests that they do not expect powerful colleagues to regard a decision in <u>their</u> (the colleagues) favour as unfair. Perhaps the boundaries between a fair decision and self-interest are not clearly perceived.

30. People may have ambivalent feelings about exercising power and reject the idea of deliberate attempts to influence decisions. However, a tolerance of the adverse reactions of others to one's decisions indicates a willingness to exercise one's own will, even against resistance.

31. A number of perceptions about the concept of power emerge from the data:

(a) You can be seen as opting out of politics if you have enough power, which suggests a notion of political behaviour as making an effort to compete with others.

(b) "Acting politically" can be seen as a special kind of activity, distinct from other behaviour, and perhaps implying a degree of skill in influencing events, and perhaps also an inate ability.

(c) It may be difficult to detect the difference between coercive and non-coercive forms of power, since the classification of A's

behaviour in this respect depends on the feelings of B, information about which may be impossible to obtain.

(d) It is possible to distinguish between a political game and a political falsehood.

(e) Being powerful means getting your own way.

(f) "Political" is a pejorative term.

(g) A person may be seen as having a need for power, i.e. it is an aspect of their motivation, but having an intrinsic value for them, and not being directed towards some particular purpose.

(d) Theoretical implications. The data analysis in this section has theoretical implications which mostly centre around the A-B model of power discussed in Chapter 2, and the idea that power is differentially distributed, but also bringing in some of the structural aspects discussed in the previous section of this chapter, and looking forward to some value issues dealt with more fully in the next section.

The research has brought to notice the difficulties which A and B have in interpreting each other's behaviour, or assessing whether someone is powerful or not, or how much power they have, or what it is based on. People may take a view of what interests powerful people represent, and see themselves advantaged or disadvantaged in consequence, without having much direct evidence on which to base this view, perhaps because the powerful make their decisions in private meetings such as the VCAC. The interpretation of how power is differentially distributed and whether a particular individual is powerful or not, can also be seen to be dependent on the criteria adopted by the perceiver for determining this. For example, whether the criterion relates to observable behaviour, or to the outcome of the behaviour. As was mentioned in Chapter 2, section 2, the A-B model of power has limitations in that it does not include the context of the interaction between A and B, and it can be suggested that this interaction will be influenced by what A and B perceive to be this context, as well as by their own values, which guide their interpretation. There is again in this section evidence of the difficulty of determing the cause and effect of

political behaviour noted by Dahl (1968). For example, even when B appears to be complying with A's wishes, it may not be correct to assume that this compliance was due to some action of A. A may threaten to use some negative sanction (such as failure to pass probation) to make B conform, but B may do what A wants for reasons other than the presence of this sanction.

A further example of this problem occurs where A is trying to get B to do something where B is structurally more powerful than A. This may raise the question of how much autonomy B has, how free to comply with A's demands. What looks to A like freedom to decide on personal whim may in fact be the outcome of constraints which B perceives but A does not. This uncertainty about the power of B in the wider context underlines the importance of the context to the A-B model of power, and the difficulty it can create for organisation members trying to determine the cause and effect of behaviour, and hence the difficulty of knowing how to influence others.

As for the reason why a particular person may be seen as powerful, what is the perceived basis of an individual's power (see Chapter 2, section 2, page 63), perceivers may themselves be unclear on this question, but the data suggest some answers. For example, actors may be seen as powerful because of some valued expertise, or because they are seen to get their own way. "High-profile" behaviour in an organisation may enhance a perceived powerfulness and "low-profile" behaviour prevent such a perception. Membership of a particular group may also confer perceived power on an individual. However, a member of a group generally perceived as powerful may feel

relatively powerless if not involved in political processes such as the formal decision-making process. Disatisfaction at this incongruence between group membership and perceived power indicates an underlying value that certain individuals ought to have more power than others. This question of values about the differential distribution of power is discussed in the literature, see Chapter 2, section 4, and it can be suggested that being expected to be powerful can confer a perceived power on an individual, even though this perception may not be in accord with that individual's feeling of powerfulness.

It is suggested in this research that neither structural centrality of role (e.g. the PAO) nor legitimisation by external authority (e.g. the Senate) in themselves necessarily confer power, but may need in addition control of a valued resource, such as finance (PAO) or appointments (VC). A further route to power suggested in the data is being able to give attention to tasks which others cannot spend time on, so must allow those who can to make decisions, and thereby extend their domain of power.

It is further suggested that the potential for power (as distinct from the exercise of it) which is discussed in the literature (see Chapter 2, section 2) may rest, not just on such bases as expertise, but also on uncertainties in the actor's context, such as uncertainty about the facts, or about the legitimate boundary or appropriate "domain" of a person's role. This raises again the question of what power a person ought to have, and who should have more power than whom, already referred to, and also questions about the extent to

which such values are shared by organisation members, and about shared understandings of what constitutes legitimate behaviour. These issues were discussed in Chapter 2, section 2 in consideration of the symbolic interactionist view of power, and in section 4 in reference to legitimacy. It can be said that such perceptions and values about who is powerful and who ought to have power, and the uncertainties involved in them, both provide and limit political opportunities - "the chance to carry through one's own will" (Walliman et al (1980)). However, the research in this section also shows that, not only may the opportunity to exercise power arise from the procedures adopted for integrating the structure, as discussed in the previous section, but may also arise from the way in which different parts of the structure may provide some individuals with better opportunities than others, regardless of a similarity in status between these individuals. For example, just by being a professor of a small school rather than a large one, you could be a permanent member of an integrating committee, rather than a temporary one, an outcome which may be seen to illegitimately favour the "less powerful" (i.e. smaller Schools and their professors). One can see that in such cases structural opportunities for power may run counter to values about who ought to be powerful.

This research suggests that the question of the importance of the issue, which as was indicated in Chapter 2, section 3, has an impact on political opportunity and is part of the potential for power, may depend, not just on shifts in salience over time - i.e. what is an important issue today is not important tomorrow - but also on the

perceiver's perspective from within the structure, so that what looks important to one person is less so, or unimportant, to another. According to "strategic contingency" theorists (see Chapter 2, section 3) important issues which arise from demands made by powerful sectors of the organisation's environment provide the opportunity for power for those who can deal with such contingencies. In this study, for example, it could be said that the VC and the PAO both derived power from the importance of financial resources in times of economic stringency, and the dependence of the organisation on an external source of funds (the UGC). Expertise in dealing with this issue and a role which provided the opportunity to interpret the external demands and have one's interpretation accepted (Salancik and Pfeffer (1977)), were means by which particular individuals in particular parts of the structure, at a particular time, could acquire power. In this instance it can be seen that the "strategic contingency" and "symbolic interactionist" perspectives combine to show how individuals can be in a position of political opportunity. However, it was recognised in this research that this opportunity is not sufficient without the skills to make use of it. It can be suggested from the data that these skills include the ability to deal with ambiguity of domain - for example, what is to be considered within the remit of a financial expert - and the uncertainty inherent for others in one's having expertise which they do not share. The avoidance of challenge may be a necessary skill in this respect. Perception about the social system - for example, whether groups exist or whether they act in concert as a coalition - will affect the actor's subjective judgements about what steps can be taken.

As has been implied in Chapter 2, sections 5 and 6, such perceptions affect A's judgement about the tactics which can be used to gain the compliance of B, for example in deciding whether a rule exists and/or whether it can be ignored, and what the chances are of securing the positive attitudes of B. It can be suggested that the actor's perception of the opportunities and constraints on behaviour in the organisational context may considerably influence what is attempted. The nature of such perceptions may be illuminated by the advent of newcomers into the organisation, who may be at an advantage or disadvantage because of their unsocialised status, and a tendency for existing organisation members to feel that they should acceed to newcomers' demands.

The research in this section offers a further comment on the "strategic contingency" concept, seen as a route to power, in the opportunity it offers for increasing the individual's domain of power beyond the contingency itself. For example, the strategic contingency route to power may provide the individual with status and authority to play a number of additional roles beyond his or her competence, or into areas in which a clash of values with others may become important. One person's advancement by the strategic contingency route may therefore be of considerable disadvantage to others in the organisation, through this creation of roles and spreading of the domain of power.

In this study it can be seen that the opportunity to play a number of different roles in the organisation could also be in itself a political opportunity since individuals could choose to emphasise

whichever one best suited their self-interest as they perceived it, even though this might not match the perceived needs of others who were affected by this choice. In the conflict of self-interests which may result from such a situation, it can be difficult for the structurally less powerful to successfully pursue their own perceived self-interest when there is, as in this case, little task interdependence or highly asymmetrical interdependence between the people concerned. A professor might be, for example, an "anti-patron" to a lecturer, but this may not matter at all to the professor, but be of considerable consequence to the lecturer. The structurally less powerful may also be at a disadvantage if they do not see how the more powerful are dependent on them. As was suggested by the literature in Chapter 2, sections 3 and 5, lack of awareness of factors in the A-B relationship which might provide opportunities for power, is an important aspect of that relationship.

In this interaction between individuals, there is the question of the difficulty of identifying the meaning of behaviour and the potential for power, of others. The intentions, interests and political position of a more powerful person are part of the organisational context of the less powerful, but they are open to alternative interpretations. Where there is little task interdependence between individuals or groups, and where there are few formal rules governing the behaviour of individuals, their behaviour may be guided by informal norms or by their own values, but if the latter, there may be a considerably diversity of behaviour between different organisation members of the same status. Their freedom to

act as they think fit makes it more difficult to predict their behaviour. Even organisational norms may not constrain them, since flouting these may be used as a political tactic. Moreover, political behaviour may be the outcome of their own personality needs for power (see Chapter 2, section 4, pp 81 et seq) rather than pragmatism. But there is a difficulty also about determining whether the powerful really are acting on the basis of particular values - such as objectivity - or simply using these as one of those "myths" of organisation which Bailey (1977) talks about (see Chapter 2, p.87). It is suggested that the boundary between conforming to values and the pursuit of pragmatic interests is not necessarily clear even to the actor.

It is suggested in Chapter 2, section 2, that B's perception of A's power may be affected by B's perception of whether or not A can apply sanctions to B, and also that the outcome of A's attempt to influence B may be assisted or thwarted by B's ability to make psychological adjustments to justify compliance or non-compliance. These processes are identified in the data, for example in the perception of whether passing probation will be used as a negative sanction, and in the rationalisations which allow a person to avoid doing research. It can be added that the resistance of B (see Chapter 2, section 4) may be facilitated by the opportunity and skills to 'con' A, for example, in situations where A is committed to a bargain which B may be able to avoid fulfilling, but may also be able to conceal this fact. Moreover, B's resistance may be due to constraints on B of which A is unaware, or has failed to take into

account, such as the opposition of other individuals or groups to what A requires of B, or a lack of resources which B needs in order to comply. It can be seen therefore that the resistance of B may arise, not from a resistance of will or clash of values, but from contextual constraints. However, it may be difficult for the perceiver to determine whether such constraints are real, or opportunities for B to justify non-compliance.

The capacity of B to resist the influence attempts of A has a bearing on the "strategic contingency" view of power. Whereas A may have identified the action necessary to meet the demands of external pressures on the organisation over an important issue (such as how to obtain money from the UGC) this action may require changes in the activities of B, but these may be unpalatable to B or perceived to be against B's self-interest. It may be possible for A to try to manipulate incentives such as promotion so that it becomes advisable for B to comply for the sake of self-interest, provided that such incentives are available to A. However, if what B considers to be an incentive is intrinsic rather than extrinsic, it may be impossible for A to change B's perceived self-interest in the necessary direction. For example, it is difficult to see how A can cause B to be intrinsically interested in doing research rather than teaching, if teaching is a long-term interest of B. This would seem to involve changing B's compliance from a cooperative (based on shared values) to a calculative one (based on assessment of pragmatic interest) (Etzioni (1961)). However, both types of contract were found in the data, and also examples of

failure to get the compliance of B in an attempt to meet a strategic contingency. For example, there were people who did not want to do research, and refused to do any, and others who did not want to but pretended to want to, and still others who wanted to and did. A coercive contract did not seem to be possible. These issues suggest a connection between motivation theory and theories of power.

This problem of gaining the compliance of B to meet a strategic contingency identified by A, might be used to justify the unequal distribution of power if A's perception is accepted as representing "reality". One could then say with Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) that A should have enough power to align the organisation with this reality (see Chapter 2, section 4). In the organisation studied there seemed to be a general consensus about the nature of that reality and what had to be done to meet it, but with a few dissenting voices as a reminder that, as the symbolic interactionists suggest, defining reality is in itself a political act. (See Chapter 2, section 2).

4. The culture of the university

The culture of the university can be seen as the mixture of norms of behaviour existing in it, together with the values of individuals, which may be congruent or incongruent with these norms. Sometimes people made direct comments about their perception of the norms existing in the organisation, or about their own values. At other times people's comments indicated an underlying value although it was not directly expressed. The norms dealt with here are those concerned with research, competitiveness, the use of information, management style and the handling of conflicts.

The theme that the university is in transition recurred quite frequently in the data. References were made to its being relatively new, an ex CAT and to the change in Vice Chancellor. However, it was pointed out that it was becoming crystallised into one form, although still at present dynamic, and the possible outcome of that crystallising process was suggested by an informant who said, "Places like Leeds may have more goodies, but I observe they suffer from long-term staff having entrenched rights to those goodies. In a way it's an advantage to be in a newer university". This raises the question of what is becoming entrenched at Bath.

Other data reflect the shifts in norms and divergences of values perceived to result from this transitional status. One topic around which these shifts and divergences gather is research itself.

(a) Research values. Among the Deciders group, the importance of research in the university was hardly disputed, and the re-orientation of the staff towards research commented on. A typical remark: "The university is an ex-CAT*. The staff were more teaching oriented 10 years ago and there were a lot of non-researchers here. It's our top priority to increase research", and, "It's a young university and research is a new field so we have to make a conscious effort to get it going". However, the comment, "There's a lot of stress on doing research these days at Bath - perhaps an obsession some would say", indicated a mildly dissenting view.(1)

Among the Applicants group, there was general agreement in views about the importance of research to the university and as shown in the previous section many people had a personal interest in doing it. However, there was more dissent and it was more sharply voiced than in the Deciders group: "There is hysteria about research and publication" and, "The university is neurotic about research" were examples. Some people felt it was wrong that no credit was given to being a teacher, and the suggestion was made that doing research was detrimental to teaching, "There is no doubt that when you start research in the department, the undergraduates suffer". For this reason the staff in some Schools felt antagonistic

*CAT = College of Advanced Technology

to the new orientation. "There is hostility among the staff towards the rest of the university because in the School they want to do teaching etc. and not research." Commenting on the drive to increase postgraduate student numbers another informant said, "Postgraduate numbers lead to more money for the university. It's one of those numbers they use. It's one of those indices they use these days and I feel they are often irrelevant". The suggestion here was that although the university's attempt to increase postgraduate numbers was understandable, nevertheless it could be leading the university astray from its "proper" function. (1)(6)

Apart from the importance placed on doing research, other questions arise about research itself, what it is, what sort of research is favoured. One Applicant commented: "Our approach to research is misunderstood by the rest of the university", which suggests that there is a sharp difference of view about what research should be like. Another said that, "There are intellectual biasses about epistemology" and that these formed part of "the political realities of the university" which suggests conflict between groups or individuals over these differences. By contrast, a member of the Decider group said that, "There is no problem about defining research". This professor was seen as having a very biassed view of research by an Applicant with whom he had crossed swords on a

a research matter: "He couldn't see the ways I was thinking and couldn't move from his own view to someone else's" and, "His questions showed that he had no idea of the field of study". This contrasts with the professor's definition of what research is: "Research is something of interest to the member of staff, a problem or new idea or disproving something. It depends on the collection of data and the interpretation of data. It doesn't need to be statistical". This statement suggests an open-minded view which would be capable of encompassing many different approaches to research. The mismatch between these perceptions is curious and perhaps it highlights the difficulty specialists have in communicating across subject boundaries, particularly if there is no perception that a problem exists. The difference in power between the Applicant and the Decider is relevant to this conflict, in that the burden of proving his case rested with the Applicant - it is easier for the powerful to have their definition of "research" prevail.(2)

Another informant in the Deciders group considered that there <u>was</u> a question to be raised about research: "The question arises 'what is research?' It is a question of what you do and how it is published". The notion that publication shows that research has

been done was a common theme in the data. Here it seems to be implied that the answer to the question, "what is research" can be found in a certain type of outcome by which it is made manifest to the outside world. Research is that which is published in journals and books, as well as being an activity in itself. If no-one publishes it, should it be assumed that it wasn't "really" research? Does it matter how it is published? For example, if it is turned into a learning package for schools, does that count?

Doubt was expressed about the value of much publication. "When you look at publications it often appears that they almost duplicate each other, and few are really worthwhile". Another suggestion was that you can get a "stab in the back" rather than accolades if you publish too much duplicate material, indicating that some sanctions are seen as needed against the abuse of publication as an indication of research.(2)(5)

One informant in the Decider group made a distinction between "scholarly work" and "research" and also between proper research - "a long hard slog" and a low-level routine activity. "Research is not just a matter of taking readings off apparatus every morning". Another person suggested that the university needed to take a different view of research. "The trouble is that we still work on the scientific model - a research student in a lab. This doesn't suit all activities," a view supported by another comment, "Research in our subject is different from that in science. Science works more to the standard pattern of the young person with a degree working with a professor on his research, doing laboratory experiments and writing them up".

A technologist commenting on research in his field said, "Science and engineering must have someone at the bench full-time, researching, computing etc. It takes two people, a student and a supervisor to do research properly". It is interesting to note in these last two comments that this view of how research in science is done would not be shared by some scientists at Bath, as shown by the data on how groups are formed in the organisation, (2)(5) (see page 137).

Another question which recurred in the data was whether research should be pure or applied. Should it deal with knowledge for its own sake, or should it be useful? Someone, who was slightly hedging his bets on this said, "The meaning of a university is research and teaching together, and the dispersal of knowledge. This work can contribute to the economy, be useful". This comment seems to beg the question: It <u>can</u> contribute to the economy, but does it have to? And is usefulness only to be defined in economic terms? Another comment was: "The university was set up to deal with practical matters, assistance to industry", and he suggested that people did not necessarily understand this, and some were against this view of the university. "They can therefore be surprised by the turns of university policy, and they don't like them." (2)(3)(6)

One theme that recurred in the data was the perception that the social sciences were useless by definition, usually mentioned by people in the Arts area For example: "A lot of people in science are very anti social science. They will say it is a useless area", and of a Decider in Technology, "He is anti social science. He doesn't see any reason why social processes need investigation,

because they are self-evident". This is perhaps related to the view of the university as being scientific and technological in orientation, and therefore the rationale for the Arts area being unclear. The Cinderella role of the Arts area has been referred to in the discussion of the university structure, but it should be mentioned here that not everyone sees it that way. One relatively new Decider commented, "I am not convinced about the Science/ Technology bias of Bath. I haven't found it myself, though others in the School have felt it". An Applicant who had been in the university some years also rejected the idea that people in non-applied subjects such as history or theoretical sociology were at any disadvantage, although he himself subscribed to the "usefulness" value.(2)(3)(4)

The idea that the university is "technological" recurrs in the data, and the university was at one time called "University of Technology", a title to which some people, I was told, strongly objected. "It was felt that the technology title made it a second class university somehow." One informant took a legalistic stance on the question. "The university charter states that this is a technological university catering for the needs of society". Another suggestion was that it was more a matter of political realities, "Science and technology have the strength and power in the university", however, he went on to say, "My subject could gain some sympathy from scientists because it could be seen as dealing with hard numbers and measurement", a comment which seems to shift the argument away from "is it useful" to "is it seen to be useful", quantification being taken as the sign

of scientific or technological research and hence of usefulness. Thus, powerful people in the organisation can obtain a distorted perception of a subject in a way which is an advantage to that subject. Consequently "it is not an alien environment" for that subject.(6)(7)

The scientific and technological bias does, however, create an alien environment for some subjects according to some informants: "There is little understanding of our problems in the university... we are at the end of most queues", and "The School is a foreign body at Bath". However, another informant, while acknowledging the power of science, due to the VC's being a scientist, nevertheless did not feel alien: "We have to work twice as hard to get what we want... but I don't feel like an outsider in a technological university".

One informant referred to the distinction between being scientific and being useful, and rejected the suggestion that pure science might find difficulty in keeping its head above water, while admitting that the trend was towards applied science. "Our aim is to extend knowledge, whether by pure or applied research". However, his comment, "It is easier for pure science to argue that it might be useful in future than for literature and language research to show that it might be useful" is an acknowledgement that usefulness might be required ultimately, and also indicates a perception of what usefulness is. On this view the "needs of society" are perhaps to do with solving particular problems. As another informant put it, "The problem is not being able to say that researching colour images in Kafka is 'useful', but improving the railway system in Pakistan <u>is</u> useful".

People seemed to have an idea in their minds about that "useful" means, and no-one raised the question of its definition.(2)(3)

An informant from the Arts area suggested that economic circumstances contributed to the pressure for applied approaches to research. "In the present climate there is no way of developing the non-applied side of things, and we have a no-growth situation anyway... The pressure is on the abstract people at every level, in ordinary conversation and in meetings and from the VC". However, there were some dangers seen in this applied orientation: "There is a limitation on the university because there is so much emphasis on application. You ought to have the theoretical grounding as well, but this gets pushed out... the university is out of balance as a university". In the science area too, doubt was expressed about the "applied" bias. "You should be able to pursue pure science research and not have to show usefulness."(3)(6)

The way in which research arises has a bearing on the question of usefulness. In technology, research was said to be funded largely by companies who wanted a problem solved, and is therefore by definition intended to be applied and useful. Research as a response to external demands for problem solving has its limitations, as one technologist indicated, "Getting money from the Equipment Fund gives me more freedom of action in choosing my research lines. I don't have to be tied to what I can get someone outside to be interested in". In science, although it was said that research grants come from a variety of outside sources, including industrial companies,

it was denied that this meant problem-solving in quite the same way "we do basic research not product development" was the comment.

Perhaps behind these views about research is a commonly held view of the need for usefulness, but a range of ideas about what usefulness is. On the one hand it is solving a particular problem for a client, and perhaps this represents one end of a continuum, the other end being research undertaken because of the interest of a member of staff, but which in the long term the outside world might find useful. At some point the initiative for innovation changes from being predominantly within the organisation to being predominantly outside it. It may be that the absence of consensus about research values arises because some people see as opposites to this process of "changing the world" as someone put it, being abstract or theoretical or the absence of quantification in methodology.(3)

One slight twist to the question of research values was given by the comment that, "making money seems to be a criterion in the university" or rather more cynically, "money in, paper out" was a description of the university system. This seems to suggest that usefulness to the organisation itself is part of the picture of research norms, while the data on pressures on staff to do research also indicate that career considerations are also a factor in relating the individual's research values to the research norms of the organisation. These comments on the nature of research suggest that there is no consensus of view about what it means to do research, what criteria should be applied in assessing the value of a piece of research, or on methodology.(2)(6)

INFERENCES

1. When an organisation changes its policy there is a shift also in the perceptions of what is to be valued, which in turn changes the balance of power away from some individuals and groups and towards others. This is reflected in what the organisation will spend its resources on, as well as how the contribution of individual members of the organisation will be evaluated. Although many people in the organisation may welcome these changes, as being in line with their own values, some will feel that their situation has been changed for the worse, and their contribution no longer held in esteem.

2. Where a highly valued activity is not easily definable, individuals and groups will try to characterise it so that it most suits their preferences. Operationalising the concept, e.g. in this case saying what will be taken as a sign of research having been done, will become an important activity if there are resource implications of the definition. In these circumstances groups will try to have the activity defined in a way which will justify their claims on resources and may also seek to exclude other groups from a share of resources by the same means.

3. A consensus may develop from a narrow range of definitions of a criterion by which a major activity is to be evaluated, "usefulness" in this case. Groups may fail to take action to either broaden this definition or to bring their activities within its range, with the consequence that their raison d'etre in the organisation will be undermined, both in their own eyes and in others.

4. Prejudice against a group may manifest itself as dogmatic statements that the group's activities fail to meet the criterion of evaluation as normally defined in the organisation. This enables some people to justify the exclusion of the group from sharing in the organisation's resources when they have no other way of justifying this.

5. Where an organisation has to deal with complex abstractions, there is a considerable danger that the meaning of its activities will shift in undesirable ways. So, research activity in this case could turn into the simple production of paper or the routine reading of apparatus. Organisational procedures for identifying such activities, evaluating them and apportioning resources to them are a major factor in bringing about such shifts of meaning.

6. Difficulties of obtaining a consensus about organisational priorities and how activities are to be evaluated may be related to a lack of consensus about the purpose of the organisation as a whole. This may be related to wider values about what organisations of that type should be like and their place in society. The policies pursued by the dominant group in an organisation may seem to some members to be contrary to, or falling short of, these wider values.

7. It can be to your advantage if powerful individuals and groups misunderstand your activities by applying irrelevant criteria which enable them to define these activities in ways which make them acceptable to themselves. (e.g. It is all done with numbers, therefore it must be scientific, therefore it is OK).

(b) The use of information

Among the Deciders group, the clearest indications about the norms of secrecy in the organisation came from their replies to my requests for information. One piece of information which one area regarded as secret was the names of people who had applied for Research Funds. One informant wanted to say that it was not a competitive situation and that people would not want it known that they had applied. Another that the decision criteria themselves were confidential to the Area committee, and were not known to the Applicants. A third member of the Deciders group suggested that the reasons why people were turned down should not be generally known "largely because it would cause appeals against the decisions". In all these cases, secrecy can be seen as a form of protection; of the Applicants against loss of status with their colleagues; of the Area committee's autonomy to choose their priorities among the applications; of the Deciders against appeals from Applicants; and perhaps also to prevent competition from becoming manifest. Another informant considered the whole decision-making process in the university as a "management tool" which should be kept confidential, presumably in order to give the university an edge in its competition with other institutions. (1)(7)

Among Deciders and Applicants, one or two were concerned about the confidentiality of the interviews. For example, "I am concerned that my views should not be broadcast round the university", or the Decider who was "anxious that any report you made would not make information attributable to particular departments"

The usefulness of withholding information was indicated by one Decider who suggested that if one Area finds out what another Area is putting forward as its list of applications for the Research Fund before this information has been reciprocated, that could be to the first Area's disadvantage. Another informant indicated the importance of not disclosing or drawing attention to information about applications which could be seized on by another Area as a reason for not awarding funds to your applications.

A further perception about the usefulness of withholding information was that the less it flows the less trouble there is, as revealed by the comment, "It's all so difficult... the less said about it the better".

Such informants were clearly aware of the political nature of information in that they saw it as capable of affecting their own position in some way, even when the information concerned what was, in university terms, a relatively minor matter such as the Research Fund. Apart from these comments about the research project itself, evidence about the use of information in the organisation emerges also in other ways from the data. Comments were made about the availability of information and the impact of this availability; and about trends in information availability within the university and differences between Schools or Areas.

Two people suggested that information could be obtained informally: "There is plenty of information around - you can cultivate the right people, those who have been on the committee, the Head of School".

and, "I know from the Prof who has applied, and I assume other people know from him that I have". More typically, however, people reported being "in the dark", particularly about the reasons why their application was not successful (which the majority are not). One person suggested that the URF was run in a similar way to the SRC system: "I wasn't told why my application was turned down. It is rather arbitrary; they suddenly tell you you haven't got it. There is secrecy about it as with the SRC unless you know people on the committee who feed information back to you or in other ways give you something to go on. They tend to say its just unfortunate - I think there should be some dialogue".

One effect of the lack of information surrounding the Research Fund was that people acquire false information about it. For example, I was told that the Vice Chancellor arbitrated between the applications; that the Board of Studies of a School considered them; that the final decision was made at Area level; that it was not necessary to have a named student this year; and that the applications could not be referred by anyone inside the university, all of which views were false. One person thought that the content of his application (in a social science subject) "was assessed by a Professor of German". Another was unaware that the person to whom he had gone for advice about his application was also applying to the Fund.(4)

Opinions were divided as to whether the protection of confidentiality was necessary to Applicants. For example, one informant commented that "people mind about the list of rankings being published, especially if they are low on the list, because they don't like their

project being put down in that way". A contrary view put forward was that because people apply for awards so much, both inside and outside the university, they are accustomed to being turned down: "We are hardened to not getting awards", and because it is like trying your hand at the pools, that is, a game of chance rather than a true competition, there is no disgrace in losing. It is interesting to note here that the ranking of applications can be taken to indicate academic merit, when in fact it could mean an ordering by youthfulness and inexperience, so that the better (academically) applications could come at the bottom of the list. Publishing the ranking of applications without publishing the decision criteria actually used could cause unnecessary anguish. This clearly relates to the importance placed on reputation and hence status in the university, as witness the difficulty some referees have in giving a lower grading to the applications of senior colleagues. In the light of that value orientation, publishing one piece of information without the other, i.e. the ranking without the criteria, could cause distorted perceptions of the meaning of decisions.(1)(4)(5)

There were also indications from some people that the system had become more secretive than it had been: "We used to get a list through the Board of Studies of priorities given to applications, but they stopped doing it - I don't know why not". And from another informant: "The whole system is too secret. At one time you could read minutes of Senate and they'd mean something. Now because of bureaucracy they refer to papers you don't have access to so you have no idea of what's going on unless you're one of the few".

There were also indications that the level of secrecy varies between Schools and between Areas. On the whole, science and technology were represented as being more secretive than the Arts area, but within the Arts area there were variations: "On their School agenda it mentions applications for grants, and discretionary action by the Chairman - there is fairly public discussion about it - this doesn't happen in our School".(6)(7)

One question which arises about the flow of information in the organisation is the extent to which its lack of circulation is due to secrecy - deliberate withholding of it - rather than other causes. The data shows that people are sometimes ill-informed because they do not seek the information out, in some cases because they do not consider the issue of sufficient importance to warrant the effort, "There's no time to fuss about it... one would be wasting time". It can be suggested too that people who are relatively new in the organisation and relatively junior do not have access to, or know of the existence of, the informal channels of communication which could provide them with information. Also, that communication takes time, and people who have information may not want to spend time passing it on if they have other priorities, especially perhaps if their orientation is outside rather than inside the organisation.(1)

The criteria by which a decision will be made are an important part of the political processes of decision-making because of their effect on the outcome of the decision. From the point of view of the flow of information it is interesting to see what criteria participants in the process think are being used, either by themselves if they are

Deciders, or by others. The criteria used in the URF decision-making process provide an example of how perceptions of criteria used in decision-making can vary between individuals and groups.

Taking the Decider and the Applicant groups together, the perceived criteria fall into six categories: criteria relating to the substantive content of the application; to the Applicant himself/herself; to the research student; to some administrative matter; to the referee, the School or the committee; and to the presentation of the application.

Since everyone with whom the URF was discussed was asked about the criteria, the results are tabulated below:

TABLE 5 Perceptions of decision criteria

Relating to:	n=20 Deciders	n=23 Applicants	Total n=43 Total
1. Substantive content	9	17	26
2. Applicant	15	16	31
3. Student	5	3	8
4. Administrative matter	14	16	30
5. Referee, School, Committee	1	7	8
6. Presentation of application	2	6	8

"Administrative matters" includes such considerations as whether a studentship or a grant is applied for, whether the application has been ranked first on a previous listing, whether it would lead to a grant

being awarded for further work from outside sources, whether the research has already started.

These figures suggest that most weight is perceived as given to the content, the Applicant and administrative considerations, but it is interesting to note the divergence of perception between Deciders and Applicants over the importance of content, the Deciders giving more weight to the Applicant and the administrative matters than to the content than is perceived by the Applicants.[2][3]

It is also interesting to look at the most reported criteria - regardless of the above categories. Criteria with more than five mentions were as follows:

TABLE 6 Most reported decision criteria.

Criteria	Deciders	Applicants	Total
1. Being young and junior (it was usually assumed that these conditions coincide).. ..	7	7	14
2. Technical, Scientific, Academic merit of application.. ..	3	7	10
3. Being new member of staff ..	2	4	6
4. Pump-priming project	4	3	7
5. Reputation/track record of staff	3	3	6
6. Wording/presentation of project	2	6	8
7. Useful/practical/applicable project	3	4	7
8. Relevance/topicality of project	2	4	6

These figures show a divergence of view between Deciders and Applicants which is quite marked in some instances - for example, items 2 and 6.

Some people among the Deciders (the referees and some professors) had particular responsibilities for ranking or grading applications, and could therefore be seen as being particularly powerful in the decision-making process. They appear to have not taken much account of items 2, 3 and 6, but have subscribed to all the others, and added also the criterion of having named student for the project.(2)(3)

It would appear, therefore, that the Applicants are not so far out in their estimate of what criteria are most important as the raw distinction between Deciders and Applicants criteria might suggest. Yet Applicants do not appear to be well informed, as has been shown, and perhaps one therefore has to assume that they share the same values as those Deciders who are relatively more powerful than they over this issue.(2)(3)

Some people among the Applicants group said that certain considerations were positively <u>not</u> used as criteria, even though in some cases they suggested that they ought to be. These were:

<u>Being young and junior</u> (because it was clear that in the past senior and older members of staff were given awards from the Fund. Two people in the Deciders group, both referees, also said that being senior was a criterion for success).

Academic merit (because they (Deciders) don't know anything about my subject, or because that sort of judgement across disciplines is not practicable).

Studentships rather than grants applied for (because the university no longer makes this distinction).

Having a named student (because I have been told this is not necessary).

A project which is useful/practicable/applicable (because if it is a good project it will get through regardless. This was also asserted by a member of the Deciders group, "No priority is given to practical research".) (2)(3)

INFERENCES

1. People may lack information of importance to a particular activity for a number of reasons: the information is deliberately withheld as a protective measure; they fail to seek out information; information is only available through informal channels to which they do not have access.

2. Having accurate information may be a matter of being able to accurately interpret the power structure relating to the decision, which will indicate whose "information" will be regarded as correct. In this case, because there were such a large number of criteria which might possibly be applied, it matters whose criteria they are.

3. Knowing the relevant criteria (i.e. those which will be applied by the most powerful participants in the decision-making process) enables people to attempt to influence decision-making in their favour, by demonstrating that their bids meet the criteria.

4. One result of a lack of information is that people can acquire information which is false. Saying this, of course, assumes that there are "facts" to be known, but questions such as whether or not a committee deals with a particular topic, or whether it has the final decision-making authority or passes it on to another committee, come as near as any to being able to be answered factually.

5. Where there is uncertainty about the criteria being applied in a decision-making process, people will infer the criteria from the decision that is actually made. The inference may not coincide with

the criteria actually applied by decision-makers, and this may provide false information to the participants as to the meaning of the decision for them as individuals.

6. Where there is no task inter-dependence between groups it is possible for them to vary in their handling of information, so that there can be easier access to information in one group than in another.

7. As the organisation develops, norms about the use of information crystallise into procedures which most suit those with the most power. This is likely to be in the direction of withholding information or limiting access to it.

(c) Competition. An aspect of the culture which is of relevance to perceptions of power is the perception of the culture as being, or not being, competitive. Some informants made a distinction between being in a competitive culture and competing over a particular issue. It can be suggested that seeing yourself to be in a competitive culture involves seeing other people as rivals or potential rivals for some valued long-term objective or for an advantageous position in the social structure. Structural aspects of power in the organisation, such as a bias towards one particular group's values and demands can in turn affect the opportunities for gaining advantage over others, and it has already been shown that there are winners and losers among Areas and Schools in the university. One Decider also pointed out that a procedure adopted to determine priorities among applications to the Research Fund emphasised the politics of the situation, (for example, the role of the VCAC in the process) whereas an alternative procedure (an independent committee) would put more emphasis on the academic merit of applications, suggesting that the procedure of decision-making itself which structures the process, could alter the basis of competition, and therefore the balance of advantage.(5)(8)

Comments were made about the value placed on competition itself, and also about its relationship to other values held by individuals. It was suggested that competition was "a good thing" by one member of the Applicants group, and an advantage of the present URF system, since it would increase the quality of applications for funds. One Applicant however commented that "competitive behaviour is contrary

to the whole idea of a university", since it encouraged behaviour such as the withholding of information, and another rejected it, in that it lead people to do research "in order to get on" - i.e. for the wrong reasons. This informant would probably not have approved of the strategies reported by some people for trying to get research grants: "It's the in thing to do work on engineers at the moment, so I might slant my work that way. 'Why British Industry isn't doing better' is the kind of research that gets grants, even if they're academically rather poor". Another example was the tailoring of the cost of the project to the amount of money likely to be given "I was told that I would be more likely to get a medium range amount of money - under £1,000 - so I have tailored my project to fit that and asked for £900". Others reported asking for studentships rather than grants, even though the latter would be more useful to them, because "you are more likely to get a studentship". These strategies, though adopted, may go against the grain. "It is not really right to distort one's application in this way, but..." Competition can be seen as infringing other values because of the kinds of behaviour it encourages, but some people find competition quite compatible with other values. (2)(3)

Some people in both the Deciders and the Applicants group considered that the URF was competitive to the point where people would not want it known that they had applied for these awards and failed - they would be disadvantaged in some way.

One informant who was not too concerned about winning an award was nevertheless clearly aware of the competitive nature of the situation

"I wouldn't discuss the application widely with other staff because I wouldn't want to encourage them to apply and compete".

Although some people reported that the URF decision was a competitive situation, the culture in general is not seen as particularly competitive. Various factors in these perceptions were summed up by one informant who commented, "Some people are competitive as an individual characteristic, whereas others don't care. It depends on your aspiration level. If you feel there's a realistic chance of getting on you might make a bid to compete. It is a competitive situation whether or not we agree to compete, but it is not a competitive culture as such. There isn't a realistic chance of promotion these days." There are various factors here in the perception of people's competitiveness. One is that some people are more competitive by nature than others, it is a part of their personality. It is an aspect of their personal goals, rather like McClelland's n Ach - some people set high goals for themselves, others do not. There is also the question of competitive action - making your bid to compete - which is perhaps the same as mobilising your political resources. If the object of competition is not likely to materialise - why compete for promotion where there is none - people will tend not to mobilise their political resources. The suggestion is that this is the current situation at Bath. There is nothing to compete for, so people don't bother. The idea that you can have a competition situation "whether or not people agree to compete" is also interesting. This person had put in an application although he thought he had "no chance" of success and

had not made much effort over it. Competing on this view means making an effort, rather than just putting in an application. It indicates the difference between the potential for competitive action inherent in the situation, and actually making an effort to win. (1)(4)(8)

Another interviewee who, with one or two other members of a group, worked closely with the professor as patron, was asked about the feelings of other people outside this coterie - did they feel competitive with this group? The reply was, "They may be competing but I'm not". This again suggests that competing means making some special effort, and in this instance no effort need be made perhaps by those in a good position already. (1)(8)

However, that people do feel competitive with each other over aspects of their work which most concern them is indicated by the comment of one person who was clearly trying to make his name through research and publication: "If someone else gets something published you feel slightly piqued... but you rationalise it by saying it's nice for them..." Here one of the person's colleagues is seen as a rival, and it is not pleasant to feel that the rival has got a step ahead, so the situation has to be deliberately reinterpreted in order not to feel piqued. The shift was also in the direction of maintaining good relations with a colleague. (3)(8)

That competition for status can exist between colleagues was indicated by the comment "my closest colleague tends to use the situation (of my consulting him) to his own advantage. He makes public use of it, tends to be condescending, so I don't feel much confidence in

discussing things with him". It would appear that the person asking for advice is being made to feel inferior and being used to demonstrate the superiority of the colleague who seizes the opportunity to gain an advantage. The informant perceives this to be a competitive situation created by the colleague, which has resulted in limiting communication between them. The importance of status in a group was also suggested by this comment by a Decider who offered it as a reason why some members of staff did not get involved in research projects, which might take them outside their well-known areas and possibly reveal weaknesses: "Everyone wears their cloak. There's a lot of face around here".(4)(2)

But, is the URF really a competitive situation? One person commented that the Research Fund was "like a football pool - I may be lucky" and another reported that there had been a suggestion in the Area that all the names of Applicants be put in a hat and a draw held, indicating a feeling that the competition was not in fact true competition - i.e. the winners were not necessarily "better" than the losers.

One Applicant suggested that applying for the Research Fund was "a useful exercise in formulating ideas and in making applications" and also to "show interest in research" rather than to actually obtain an award. One has to add to this the practice of one Area of limiting the competition by not opening the applications to whoever wishes to apply. Open competition does not necessarily provide a "fair" result according to this view. "... if we got a lot of applications through circularising everyone, someone has then got to decide the

the one case versus another, and that might not be fair either". A fair result depends of course on the criteria to be applied - the measurements to be relied on for judging what is "better". The attempt to limit the competition just described was in acknowledgement of the situation in an open compeition, where more senior people can choose to apply and the "academic excellence" criterion can win out over the "young/junior staff" criterion. "The younger members would not get a look in because more experienced people would put in better applications".(5)(6)(7)(8)

The way in which competition can be limited by the decision-making procedures is also illustrated in one Area by the allocation of the Equipment Fund. In this procedure the funds are divided up at the various levels, starting from the top, according to a formula which had previously been agreed. Changing the formula is difficult, because as one informant put it, if one School asks for more "the person would immediately be asked who should have less - which would put them on the spot in front of their colleagues". Apart from one portion of the money which is set aside for purchasing larger items, most of the Fund is divided up in a way which does not allow people to make bids and compete with others for it. However, this procedure was described by participants to be "an informal iterative process" of bargaining, and an "ad hoc gentlemanly agreement" which suggests that the outcome of the process is subject to scrutiny by the participants. Perhaps what competition there is involved in this process is confined to keeping one's place in the pecking order by keeping in line with the criteria on which the formula is based. As one Head of School put it, "I feel I must keep updating my information about how well the School is doing against all the criteria -

for example, ESNs, Postgraduate student numbers, numbers of staff..."(5)(8)

To say that competition is limited by the procedures adopted is not to suggest that conflict is avoided, and the ways in which the conflict are dealt with in the organisation will be returned to in another section.

INFERENCES

1. Competition can be seen as action taken to improve one's position at the expense of others. The more powerful individuals and groups in the organisation can be seen as those who have won more, or more often, in the past. If the link between winning and increased power is broken, however, competition will diminish.

2. People may reject the idea of competition, in that it may be seen as conflicting with other values, so for example "increasing knowledge" may require the sharing of information, but competition may be facilitated by withholding it. Helping others may be incompatible with competing with them, and attitudes to competition are likely to be related to perceptions of one's role in the organisation.

3. In spite of values to the contrary, it may be impossible to avoid some competitive situations with colleagues. One way of avoiding the danger to relationships inherent in this situation is to isolate the competitive event from other relationships with colleagues. Another is for "losers" to make a psychological adjustment which enables good relationships to be maintained.

4. Some people appear to have a psychological need to compete with others. Even when they do not particularly want to win, they may take steps to gain an advantage over their colleagues seen as rivals. This may be related to a need for status in a group and perhaps it is this status which is really being competed for, rather than the practical value of any particular "prize". This may also

account for the way in which competitive persons respond to requests for help from colleagues by seizing such requests as opportunities to demonstrate superiority over these colleagues.

5. It may be necessary for procedures to be adopted which limit participants to a competitive event to prevent the more powerful from seizing prizes which were intended for the less powerful. This suggests a reluctance on the part of some powerful people to place such limitations on themselves, perhaps because the habit of opportunism dies hard.

6. An event may be ostensibly competitive, in that there are limited resources to be shared among more people than can be supplied with them, but the meaning of it may be changed by participants. Competition implies that there is some evaluation between competitors, so that some are deemed more worthy than others to receive the resources. However, if it is perceived that the allocation is done by some other means than evaluation of worthiness, perhaps by throwing a dice or on the outcome of some other event over which participants have no control, then the meaning of the event may not be competition at all, but a game of chance. Participants may also have other reasons for "competing" in the event than the desire to win, and these reasons will change the meaning of the event for them.

7. Where there is some ambivalence towards the value to be placed on competitiveness, it may be that shifts in the meaning of ostensibly competitive events are a psychological means of accommodating competition with other values.

8. Perceptions of competitive culture can be complex in that the same person may distinguish between inter-group and intra-group competitiveness as well as between competitiveness of the culture and competition over specific issues. Consequently it might be said by an individual (a) we are not competitive with each other in this group (b) we compete with each other on this particular issue and (c) our group loses out in competition with other groups.

(d) Dealing with conflict. There were indications that people had views about the style of behaviour which should be adopted in dealing with one's colleagues. They divide roughly into two styles: the forceful and the "low profile". It has already been mentioned that one informant saw both styles at work in the university - the "gently, gently" approach and the "nasty". In this connection it is necessary to take into account the history of the culture. One informant commented, "Under Rotherham, people with the loudest voices got what they wanted".

The existence of a reluctance to use "robust" styles of interaction was suggested by the words used to describe disagreements. On the question of the fair allocation of resources between Areas, one informant said, "People would be suprised if 90% of the awards went to one Area" - "surprised", not "angry" (which they would undoubtedly have been). Another informant said that when minutes are written up, even though at the meeting the VCAC may have been roundly attacked for a decision, the wording in the minutes would be that the meeting was "disappointed" at the decision.

Another comment on the same lines was "Somewhere in the Senate papers you'll find the statement that the VC 'thinks it unlikely that...' overseas students will get (URF) awards - which means they won't. But you don't say that in a university directly."(1)(2)

Several people in the Deciders group made comments suggesting that the low profile was preferable. For example: "You have to continue to work with your colleagues, and if there is a strain between you

then everyone suffers. It is important in a small community to maintain good relations with people". It was suggested that people were not overtly critical of each other for the same reason - so as not to strain relationships. The suggestion here is that in a small community where people can get to know each other well, it is necessary to avoid conflict. This view was supported by the informant who said that the hierarchy of committees was there to avoid (rather than resolve) conflict. (3)(4)

One informant claimed to be ready to "have fights and bust-ups with people, but not ones which lead to ill-feeling" but also made it clear to me that his position in the university was strong, "My power position is strong. I could move to another chair at another university at any time. They therefore try to keep me happy here". It was also suggested that different Areas had different interactive styles, and that this affected the perception each had of the other. "among engineers one is expected to use very direct speech. It is a game. In the Arts area the tradition of understatement is quite strong. In Technology we tend to be blunt. In the Senate my Arts colleagues tend to think I'm being bloody minded", but he also considered that, "you change your style to suit the occasion - sometimes I pretend to be an Arts man" (i.e. adopting the under-statement style). Another technologist, however, seemed to dispute this view of engineers, suggesting that the reason why there was a science bias in the university was "because we don't scream so much". (2)(3) Not everyone, either, would agree with this assessment of the Arts area as being characterised by understatement in interactions. One

informant spoke (with some disapproval) of the Arts area being "more argumentative and ill disciplined than other areas, so some Boards of Studies in that Area are more conflictful". A further suggestion was that a direct approach was counter-productive, "If you put your head down and charge it won't get you anywhere. It is a political situation". It is interesting to note here, and in other comments, that being coercive and being political can be seen as alternatives. (2)(4)

By contrast, it was suggested that it was a disadvantage that people in one School "won't speak up for themselves at meetings", but grumble afterwards about the decisions made. When asked, "Why didn't you say so at the meeting?" they say, "It wouldn't do any good". It was also said by this informant that "academics are not good at giving ground and compromising in arguments". Where a matter had become a bone of contention, there had been "a lot of unpleasantness about it" and "I'm quite glad I don't have to get involved in the squabbles". On the basis of this information, it would appear that norms of behaviour for dealing with conflicts between individuals have not been developed further than avoidance. Even at an informal level, the way in which groups keep to their own corners of the SCR can be seen as a way of avoiding having to interact with people with whom contentious issues might arise. (2)(3)(5)

Decision-making procedures can also be adjusted to avoid overt conflict: "For capital expenditure we used to put in bids, which meant that whoever shouted the loudest got the most, but now they allocate it by ESN's" (equivalent student numbers).

Several people commented that the ability to operate effectively in meetings was important in getting your way, and one example shows how difficult it can be to get the meeting to focus on an issue which is of importance to you. In the following interaction the applications to the URF were being discussed by committee:

Professor X: (referring to an application from his School). "We had thought that these studentships were for junior staff, and so rated him B+ on that account, but if professors can apply (as two present had done) then this applicant should also be an A". This was followed by some procedural discussion to the effect that the meeting had agreed to go through all the A's first (which put Professor X's point out of order).

The committee then went on to discuss the remaining A's and then the B's without any further reference to this disputed grading, and discussed one or two other matters relating to the awards. At last, Professor X tried again:

Prof. X: "I must raise again the case of Mr. Y. He wasn't given an A because of his rank - it had been thought that only junior staff should apply."

This was followed by statements justifying the applications by professors on grounds that they had people needing to finish off research, and that other Areas had put in applications from professors last time, neither of which statements met the point which Professor X was trying to make - Mr. Y's application should be upgraded.

The discussion then slid from this to the priority to be given to named candidates and to the question of how many studentships Mr. Y's School had had in the past, to whether these had been studentships or grants, to how we were going to interleave the applications for grants and studentships this year... by which time Mr. Y had sunk without trace.(5)(6)

Perhaps this kind of problem indicates why it is that some people advocate the "high profile" style of interaction. One informant suggested that in large meetings in particular "you have to talk in a robust way... you have to make yourself heard" and "theatrical gestures are very useful". It was also pointed out that to be effective in committee it was necessary to do some homework outside the committee meeting. "People don't take the trouble to see which way the wind is blowing, so they get clobbered in committee". It was suggested that newcomers to committees and the organisation were at a disadvantage in this respect, but also that "some people pick up the idea very quickly" suggesting that differences in skills in this respect were apparent.(1)(2)(4)(5)

The personalities of those involved in such committees was said to have a considerable effect on what was done and how things were done in committees. One committee member said, "The personalities at the moment won't push. They like things to be calm. Before with Z and W (two Professors) we used to have vociferous debates and fall-outs, but I can't imagine this happening now... The people on the committee don't want tension". This suggests that the low profile norm had not always existed in that Group, but changed as group members changed. There is evidence that the norm did not exist at the

present time in other parts of the organisation. For example, "In the School we know each other sufficiently well to disagree quite forcefully". Here the perception is that the smaller the unit, the better you know people and the more you can argue with them - in contrast to the mentioned earlier view that closer association requires less open argument. On the other hand, this person would be wary of conflicts with people outside the School and particularly if it involves powerful figures in the university. "You can blacken your name if you remonstrate with them". It was said that there was no point in taking this chance if you were unlikely to be successful, or unless the issues were really important. This suggests one reason why some people do not speak up for themselves in meetings, as mentioned on page 265. If reputation is important and you will blacken your name to no avail, better to keep quiet. Another reason was given as to why people were reluctant to take up contentious issues. If a School is unhappy about its treatment, say, over the allocation of rooms, members of the School would "have to make a fuss at Board of Studies, Area level and then the Senate. A lot of people would not be prepared to create that sort of split (in the School, Area etc). It would sour relations for the next few years".(3)(4)

There is also the problem of getting a contentious matter dealt with in the right arena. Even if you are prepared to speak out strongly and argue the case against others to disagree, you may be debarred from having the opportunity to confront your significant opponents. Someone who could only raise an important (as he saw it) issue at the Board of Studies level commented, "They all nod and agree but I'm

only talking to my School. They are one's colleagues so they probably feel they must support you although they think it a bore - and it is a bore really but one must do this". Someone else referred to this same meeting as "very dreary" and "We don't seem to achieve anything". The first informant was debarred by the structure from raising the matter directly through the formal channels with those who might have been opposed to it, although these were the people who had to be convinced to bring about change. The only resort was to try to get the matter dealt with through the medium of a group of people who did not share the perception of its importance, and had not the energy to take it up with any commitment. The informant himself was beginning to hesitate about continuing the struggle "I shall give up and devote myself to other things... No, probably I will lick my wounds - not that they are wounds really - and I shall think of some other way of getting things changed." The hierarchy of committees has worked here as a means of avoiding direct confrontation between possible protagonists, but these statements also reflect the beginnings of informal political activity at work, suggesting that when thwarted by formal channels people do not necessarily give up the struggle, but look for alternative opportunities for getting what they want.(3)(5)

Although the data presented above indicate a considerable unwillingness by most people to bring conflicts into the open over contentious issues, it should not be forgotten that the VCAC meeting has been characterised as one in which conflicts of interest are overtly dealt with and resolved. One result of the existence of such a committee

was seen by two people as allowing other committees to avoid dealing with conflict themselves by passing the buck to the VCAC. This was not done overtly, but by simply not resolving a contentious point. For example, one committee was faced with the problem of putting a case forward for the replacement of staff who left the Area. "Privately they know all the reasons for not agreeing to the replacements, but they don't want clashes and friction at the meeting, so they make the recommendation to replace them all. At the VCAC the Area chairman can put forward the reasons why the posts should be frozen and the application can be turned down - but it will be the VCAC decision, so this avoids frictions in the Area." A similar point was made by another informant. Commenting on the number of "A" gradings that were given by a committee: "If you put in a lot of A's, people at the next level up have to decide between these A's. The question of who gets awards is therefore taken out of your hands, as happened this time. You could see this as handing on responsibility to someone else i.e. no-one can blame us because we didn't decide. Maybe that's what the Area wants". Alternative explanations for the actions of these committees are possible. For example, one interviewee commenting on the deliberations of a committee about applications for funds said, "Then we guess how much money might be available for us from the Fund, and ask for more as one does in negotiating". It has been shown that the organisation can be seen as characterised by competition between the Areas for resources, and that it is necessary to negotiate the best deal you can for your Group. Demanding three staff and giving a

large number of A gradings could be seen as a strategy for gaining at least the minimum of your requirements, because it allows you room to give some concessions.(5)(6)

Norms of interaction between people can be considered in the particular case of how the organisation is managed. This is a question of how people with formal decision-making roles in the organisation interact with those in relation to whom they have authority, and to what extent there is a norm apparent concerning this interaction. This question of management style will be dealt with in the next section.

INFERENCES

1. Preferred ways of dealing with conflicts of interest in an organisation may be reflected in the language people use when talking about conflicts, and tactics for dealing with them.

2. The prevailing interactive styles become a phenomenon with which the individual must deal through the available range of possibilities for compliance with or deviance from it. It may be seen as a political resource, in that you can further your own interests by such compliance or deviance.

3. People may recognise a prevailing interactive style in the organisation as either in accordance with or contrary to their own values about how people ought to interact in the organisation. There is also the problem of having the skills so to act.

4. Organisation members may prefer the avoidance rather than the open resolution of conflict for a number of reasons:

(a) They find open conflicts distasteful, and seek to avoid painful experiences. This may include a distaste for "high profile" behaviour or theatrical gestures, which may be necessary in large meetings.

(b) They perceive that if conflicts are openly dealt with they will have to face the dilemma of having to make compromises while at the same time adhering to principles which they regard as important.

(c) Their view of appropriate behaviour towards close associates excludes open conflict in order to maintain friendly relationships.

(d) Their view of appropriate behaviour towards relative strangers excludes open conflict because they perceive that such strangers may be powerful in the organisation and could do them harm.

5. Various processes in the organisation can help organisation members to avoid open conflict:

(a) Interactive processes in arenas where conflicts might arise (e.g. committees) may thwart attempts to deal with such conflicts for example, by sliding off onto other topics or ruling contentious points out of order.

(b) Where conflicts do have to be faced, the interactive process chosen by organisation members for dealing with them, for example, "clobbering" people, may inhibit other attempts to raise conflicts openly.

(c) Lobbying committee members in advance of a meeting can be used as a means of conflict avoidance.

(d) Potential protagonists may be kept apart by the formal and informal structure of representation, which limits who talks to who about what and by decision-making procedures.

(e) Conflicts may be "delegated" from one group to another, which enables the first group to avoid the problems of dealing with them.

6. What looks like conflict-avoidance may be alternatively perceived as a political strategy for furthering one's interests. Both interpretations might apply simultaneously.

(e) Management style. Perceptions about managerial norms revealed in the data tend to make use of the democratic-autocratic classification, although there were some variations on this.

Among the Decider group, one informant characterised the system as both a "workers cooperative" and an oligrarchy "and that's as it should be". The suggestion seemed to be that the organisation was run by and for the people who produced its output or product, but that it was run by just a few people. These two views would seem to be incompatible, but given the individualistic nature of much of the work done, perhaps they are less so than at first appears. This informant also thought that the system was "not oligarchic enough - power is too widely diffused" which suggests that the workers have too much control over their own work in this individualistic system. He considered that the university was run by a group of professors, but that this was not a permanent elite and that there might be one or two non-professors in it. (1)(14)

Another Decider agreed that the system was "not democratic. Just a few people, about twenty, make all the decisions, and other people have little say". An alternative suggestion was that the organisation was run by a hierarchy of committees, these being the locus of decision-making according to this view. A Decider who also saw the committee as the place for decision-making considered that representation on such committees had become too broad, "As things become more democratic they become less so... Now they have staff and students on the Senate it is less democratic". The argument seemed to be that the committee has become too "public" by including so many

different groups, so that you can no longer speak freely at its meetings and also that it becomes deflected from its true purpose. "People are using it to complain". Another difficulty, from this informant's point of view, seemed to be that he was not the sole representative of the School on committees at university level, and consequently felt a loss of control over School matters. In his view, this reduced the politics of the meeting "the politics goes", and although he agreed that this might mean that the politics simply shifts to outside the meeting, added, "It's more difficult to influence the politics then". This Decider seemed to be regretting that the organisation was not more like a conventional hierarchy, and would probably agree with the previously mentioned view that it was not oligarchic enough. (3)(4)(5)(14)(16)

There were suggestions that the preferred style of interaction of committee chairman was due to superordinate values which influenced their behaviour. For example, it was suggested that because he had a Quaker background, one Chairman "has this family concept. Everyone works together. He doesn't allow voting at meetings but will try to persuade everyone to his point of view". Another Chairman also considered that he might be influenced by being a Quaker. "They always insist on unanimous decisions and I don't like voting. If someone is not happy with a decision I try to postpone it. In the end, maybe not everyone is enthusiastic about it but they can go along with it." When asked what happened if a person did not express any views, he replied, "My duty is to ensure that all opinions are expressed". It is not quite clear from these reports

whether there is much room for adjusting the decision to meet the views of those who disagree with it. In the first case it would appear to be a matter of persuading those who disagree to change their minds, - overcoming their resistance, and it was reported that that was how some members of the committee saw it. "Some lecturers don't like this (the absence of voting) - they think he is trying to prevail over them. He is in a sense, but only because he wants the right decision". Although these decision-making processes may not be as democratic as they might appear at first glance, they do seem to represent some attempts to resolve conflicts of interest within the formal structure. (1)(2)(14)

One informant considered that committee chairmanship included the capacity to deal with vociferous persons, and seemed to view an attempt by a chairman to seek everyone's views as a form of weakness in chairmanship. "He would not be tough enough to deal with people like X" (a 'fighter') and, "He is inclined to ask everyone's opinion at the meeting, and outside, letting them have their say", but if the informant himself were chairman he would, "make sure that the decisions were made before the meetings, so that at the meeting I would know that the decisions would be made as expected". The perception seemed to be that conflicts should be controlled by turning the meeting into a rubber stamp, and by covert decision-making. This alternative was apparently favoured above the committee's previous mode of "vociferous debates" and the present one of sounding out views openly within the overall style of keeping things calm. (2)(8)(14)

The way the values of members of the Applicant group can affect their responses to the management behaviour of Deciders was indicated by this comment: "X is not a strong personality. Some lecturers need pulling up and X doesn't do it, though he should, so they get away with things. He has the status for power, but not the personality to exercise it." The way in which these values were seen as conditioned by the past experience of the informant was shown by the added comment, "Of course, I have a service background, and I'm used to everyone jumping to". However, it was not just a question of values, in that it was made clear that some of the administrative duties of this informant would have been made a good deal easier if everyone did "jump to", so that stronger authoritative control over other staff in the School would be in his pragmatic interests, as well as in accord with his super-ordinate values.(2)(14)

Some Deciders offered a rationale for an oligarchic structure of making decisions: Committees "take up too much of the staff's time and they don't get on with their academic roles. Also some of them get to like administration and they are not necessarily good at it."(7) Another considered that organisation members were individualists who were following their special interests and did not want to spend time sitting in committees. He thought that academics prefer it if other people make decisions for them, but did not agree that the university was run by a group of professors. It was also suggested that it would be an advantage to avoid taking matters to committees. It was reported with approval that on a particular issue it had been suggested that it would "cut the red tape" if

instead of putting a matter to the VCAC it were discussed by individuals directly with Mawditt. My suggestion that this might be seen as undemocratic was met with some surprise, and I had the impression that this informant related democracy with informality.(6)(13)(17)

One Decider clearly did not see it in his, or his staff's interest to be participative. Making a distinction between funding decisions and academic work he justified not involving his staff in funding decisions by saying, "I don't see why they should have to cope with this as well as me... It doesn't do me any good if they get involved".(6)

Among the Applicants group, one informant characterised the system as "very patriarchal" and said that communication was poor. By contrast, another said, "One must think of Bath as having a management system run on democratic lines, rather than as autocratic, as in industry. It runs on committees". Another said, that "things are very democratic in the Area" but suggested that they were less so in the university as a whole. An example was given of how a group had been consulted by the Head of School about its needs and had been able to reverse a proposed change to which it objected.(1)(15)

There was also some support in the Applicants group data for the view that academics do not want to be involved in decision-making in the university. One asserted that he tried to keep out of the decision-making process "and get on with the job - that's what I'm paid to do". Another, "I put all internal memos into the waste-paper basket on principle. It takes a long time to study how a bureaucracy works and I am not interested in studying how the university works". Several

other comments were made on the theme of personal autonomy within the system. "One has a lot of freedom in the sense that one can say no if one doesn't want to do things". However, another comment was, "I don't know what would happen if I refused to do something". It was also pointed out that "Not everying is in dispute. Not everything you are asked to do is against your will", and this view was shared by another who was "a willing horse" so, "I don't feel oppressed"[6][9].

One informant's comments were interesting in that they related personal autonomy, democracy and control over other people's actions. Democratic practices of consultation and recognition of the needs of different groups within the Area and the School were spoken of with approval. However, it was also suggested that administrators should be told what to do by academics. Academics should not be directed by administrators, but nor should administrators influence academic decisions. This view seemed to have behind it an idea of the purpose of the university, and that the right to decide should rest with those who carry out that purpose (as perceived by the informant). It also suggests a wish to have freedom from influence by others (autonomy) and at the same time to influence the decisions of others, where one's own interests are involved[2][7][8][14].

A further aspect of the preferred management style which can be mentioned here is the use of rules in the organisation. To what extent are there overt rules which govern the activities of individuals? It has been shown in a previous section (page 248) that the decision criteria for the URF were not clear to all participants, not everyone

involved had the same idea of what the decision rules were. It was said that the VC "doesn't like rules and set criteria - he would tell you so himself", but this informant added, "In the School we like things to be clear cut". Other people complained that, "The rules change" and one comment showed how being concerned for rules can be seen as inappropriate behaviour. "He always performs oddly in Senate, sticking to rules and regulations, the letter of the law, when everyone else realises that that is not desirable or possible. He gets jumped on by people because of this."

Against this ambiguity about rules, however, must be set practices such as the allocation of the Equipment Fund by the use of a formula which in itself constitutes a set of decision rules. (10)(11)(12)

There were also comments illustrating management style at the level of personal interaction. One member of the Decider group commented, "You can't tell anyone to do anything in a university, in fact it is a bad policy to do so. But you can indicate what you would prefer", suggesting that informal manipulation rather than overt direction is the norm. Another Decider suggested that the amount of direction of others varied with the level in the system. The image was one of hierarchy with higher and lower levels: "This is what I mean by hard-nosed power at the higher level. Going up you get these muted directives". This view of the management style of the organisation was also indicated by the Decider who would not ask his staff if they would be interviewed for this research project because, "if I speak to them they will feel obliged to agree". (1)(9)

By contrast, however, there were comments by Applicants which showed a different view: "At the moment we have a student who was just thrust on us, without our choosing, by the prof" and, "someone up there decides"(1).

The data suggest that there is considerable variation in the perceived management styles of individuals, so that some people in decision-making roles are seen as coercive, others are seen as democratic in their approach. It is interesting to note in this context that whereas one informant referred to the Head of School as "the boss", one professor consistently referred to his Group members as "colleagues", and pointed out that the university was not characterised by boss-subordinate relationships. This seems to show that perceptions about the nature of relationships in the organisation, the way in which they are classified in the thinking of individuals, can vary considerably. Nevertheless, the weight of the evidence suggests that to most people the organisation presents a picture which is not democratic, but that to most people this situation is, at the moment at any rate, sufficiently acceptable to prevent their mobilising their political resources to change it. Whereas some people might want any change to be towards greater democracy, others would like to see more centralised control, and whereas some people might wish that individuals with decision-making roles were less authoritarian, others seemed to wish some individuals to be more so.(1)(2)(6)(13)

Norms of interaction in an organisation and the prevailing management style can be seen in relationship to the values of individuals. One

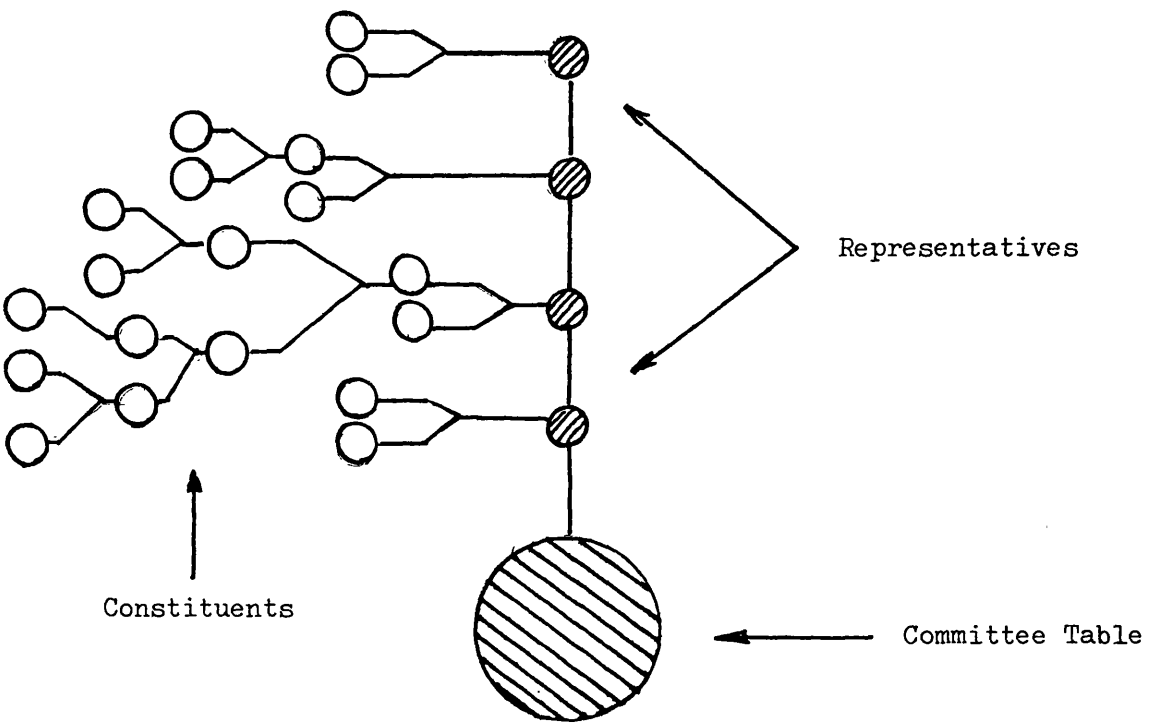
informant provided a fairly comprehensive picture of his perceptions of these norms and of his own values. His comments will be presented here, together with some contrasting perceptions of other people who although seeing the same situations, adopted different attitudes towards them.

This informant (I shall call him Zed) was in an Area in which there was considerable contention reported by others about the fairness of representation on the Area committee. Zed's view of this situation was that "It is felt that Heads of Schools can represent people in disciplines not their own perfectly well". He was "full of praise for the way this was done", in particular mentioning the Head of Physics for being able to understand the needs of psychology.(7) To a suggestion that other people in the Schools might feel less confident about their subject being represented, the reply was in essence that "most people are prepared to go along with the system". Dissenters were dismissed with "some people will not be satisfied until they get exactly what they want" i.e. their claims are illegitimate, and other people were said not to care either way because most of their funding came from outside the university. There was no room in this picture for legitimate objections which needed to be taken seriously.(13)(14) It could be that one reason for this view of what to others was a contentious matter was that some voices had been structurally blocked from the hearing of this informant.

The way in which voices can be structurally blocked out was explained to me in diagram form by another interviewee: The suggestion was that

where a group is larger and more complex than other groups, but only has the same representation as they do on the committee, it is not receiving the advantage it should have in the committee given the numbers of people in the group. The following diagram was drawn by my informant to illustrate this point:

Figure 4.



The pressure of the larger more complex group is no greater at the committee table than the pressure of the smaller, simpler groups, and consequently the pressure of the larger group is thwarted. One result is that, seen at committee level it would appear that "most people go along with" the status quo, but seen at group level, particularly in the dissenting group, there is contention and

frustration. It is interesting to note here that a somewhat mechanistic view of political processes is being put forward, as though the pressure at the committee table were something which might be measured in a Boyle's tube.(1)(13)(15)

To return to informant Zed: He seemed to see the managerial role as mainly consisting in the avoidance or even suppression of overt conflict, and spoke with distaste of an Area where this role was not being fully played. The Area in question was said to complain that they did not get enough money from the Equipment Fund, and some people were "paranoid" about it. This paranoia was "fed by their administrative style". He considered that people with roles conferring authority, such as Head of School, should be listened to in preference to the Groups they might be thought to represent, such as Boards of Studies or the School as a whole. "The Head of School's view counts, rather than the Board of Studies... we don't want a situation of taking the side of the Board of Studies against the Head of School". He would also like to see the centralisation of those administrative functions which at present report to Heads of Schools (the administrative assistant roles), and also of the technical support in the university.(13)(14)

An alternative view to the centralisation values and emphasis on authority was suggested by the Head of Group who commented, "The university should want to know what I think". The suggestion here was that his Group had a unique point of view which the organisation needed. Which voice is heard should depend on who has the information rather than who has the authority, or perhaps that authority to speak

should be given to those who have the information. Either way this would indicate that the voices of some Groups can be blocked out both because the structure denies them access to the relevant audiences, and because the values prevailing in the organisation lead to the views of some people being disregarded.(14)(15)

Zed's view of power seemed to be mainly concerned with manipulation of decisions behind the scenes. This included "finding institutional sanction for what you are doing" (presumably showing that the rules allow or require it) and when something outside the normal is done, such as the allocation of resources somewhat differently from usual, telling people in advance about it before they ask questions, because "this isolates the opposition and people then tend not to ask about it". Knowing how not to be challenged appears to be the political skill involved here aided by the perception that "simple minded professors" do not understand university finance. The fact that certain decisions are made year after year was said to help in this, because if your action seems to favour one Group this year, people will be inhibited from objecting in case they may want you to do the same for them next.(7)(11)(16)

Although "some people try to trade on" the fact that he got on better with some colleagues than others, Zed said he was unaffected by these differences. He pointed out that he did not benefit from the decisions that were made, so when it came to allocating resources he was not using his power in his own interest. He seemed to see himself as being objective and non-partisan in his judgements. He also

favoured a tough line on some issues. It has been mentioned that one area of conflict in the university arises from the change towards a research orientation. On this question my informant commented, "The proper needs of the teaching function will be met, but not the demands of people who reject the research orientation policy. The sooner they leave the better. If they don't like it, hard cheese". When it was pointed out that this change in policy represented a change in the psychological contract which some staff had built up with their organisation, he said that, "no account was taken of this", and it seemed clear that the feelings of the people involved were to be disregarded.(13)

One can contrast this view with that of the research oriented professor who thought that "not enough weight is given to achievements of people who do other things (than research) ...the divided environment affects the researchers. They are seen as a privilidged group by the dis-affected and this has an affect on them. The cost of applying a tough policy to the non-researchers is too great". This represents an interactive view of the organisation, in its suggestion that what happens to one Group, however lacking in power, will affect powerful other Groups,(13) (although it is doubtful to what extent this is true in the university).

Direct expressions of feelings over contentious issues were not favoured by Zed. A question from me about arguments over issues was translated by him into "being rude to people" - "We are all on christian name terms, and you aren't rude to people you are on christian name terms with - though you may be behind their backs".

Clearly, hostilities lurk under the calm surface. In general, Zed seemed to identify with people in authority, to see himself as being objective, tough, rational and valuing order. Conflicts of view were seen as disruptions of order and tolerance of their overt expression a weakness.(13)(14)

It would appear that some people do not see any difficulty in understanding other people's needs, while others do not feel that their needs are understood. People who are not represented at a meeting are not able to make an assessment of the quality of the discussion relating to their specialism, and members of the meeting are free to consider their grasp of the topic as adequate. To put it more directly, how do you know that a psychologist is being adequately represented by a physicist if you are not a psychologist yourself? It may be that people who value the status quo for the benefits they derive from it, justify the existing system, in part, by maintaining the belief that there is no communication problem. Norms of behaviour which inhibit making dissatisfactions known also contribute to the maintenance of the system, as do the criteria by which the effectiveness of a system comes to be judged. As one Decider commented: "Some (staff) lament certain aspects of the system but don't see it as starkly as I do. They say we got the money didn't we? ... The system is not an evil one - it works". The result of these processes is that there is a filtering out of values, opinions and information which dictates whose values and ideas will prevail in the organisation in the decision-making arenas.(2)(6)(15)

INFERENCES

1. A distinction needs to be made between the forms of democracy (i.e. the existence of representative committees) and democratic processes, which depend on the quality of interaction between individuals. Differences of place in the power structure and experiences of attempts to influence the system may account for differences in the perception of the system as "democratic". People who depend little on the management system because they have built up power-bases external to the organisation may see the organisation as "democratic" because the forms of democracy are present. People who are relatively less powerful, and need to make demands on the system, may consider it democratic or otherwise because they find that they can or cannot have their say and influence decisions. The latter experience would seem to be a better test of democracy than the former. Place in the power structure may also affect perceptions of how democratic the system ought to be. Generally speaking Deciders were more positively favourable towards oligarchy, than Applicants, even though the latter were not necessarily keen to become more involved in decision-making within the organisation. It would appear that the powerful think they should be more powerful and the less powerful disagree. However, in spite of the broad agreement, considerable variation in the perceptions of the management style of the organisation was found.

2. The quality of interaction in democratic processes depends on the interactive skills of participants and their level of interest in arriving at a democratic decision of whatever degree of democracy. This includes their level of willingness to participate in managerial decision-making and to behave in ways which they perceive to be "political".

3. Democracy by representation can reduce democratic interaction because people feel unable to speak freely. This may be related to adherence to a personal value or an organisational norm of avoiding conflicts. The greater the number of different Groups represented and the greater the differences of interests between them, the more likely it is that there will be conflicts and the more inhibited some people may be about stirring things up.

4. Where a group is represented by more than one person, the representatives may feel that the legitimacy of their representative roles is undermined and their power with the Group and in a representative committee is also undermined.

5. When the political arena is not clearly defined, that is, not centred on a clearly identifyable process such as a committee meeting, some people may feel at a disadvantage in influencing the system, particularly if they lack an informal network of relationships within the organisation.

6. Democratic ideals can be undermined by competing demands on the time and energy of organisational members. Where the organisation adopts a form of democracy which requires an organisational member to adopt two or more roles which are not interdependent (i.e. you can carry out a definitive study of goldfish without being a member of the Board of Studies), given freedom of choice the organisation member will concentrate on whichever role appears more compatible with his or her intrinsic or extrinsic interests.

7. The question of what is to be regarded as a specialist activity, that is, activity requiring special skills and knowledge which is largely not capable of being carried out by the untrained, can be turned to political advantage by individuals and Groups. If your own activities can be defined as highly specialised while others are defined as non-specialist you can justify your retaining a high degree of autonomy over your own activities while at the same time, in the name of democracy, demanding a say in the activities of Groups designated as non-specialist. In these circumstances, non-specialist Groups have a vested interest in having their activities defined as specialist also, if they are not able to undermine the specialist status of other Groups. Hence, "simple minded professors" are said not to understand university financing.

8. A distinction needs to be made between personal autonomy and democracy. In some circumstances, autonomy may consist of freedom to pursue your own interests without impinging on the autonomy of others, but where there is a conflict of interests an interface between autonomy and democracy occurs. Demanding freedom of decision-making for oneself and denying it to another is not democratic, nor is demanding a say in other people's decisions while denying them a say in yours. However, it is possible to justify the latter inequality by references to some superordinate values, such as a reference to the purpose of the organisation, which can be used to show that the balance of decision-making power ought to rest with yourself.

9. People can feel that they have a considerable degree of personal autonomy, a feeling which may stem from a high level of congruence between their own interests and the demands made on them by the organisation, and/or from their not having tested the boundaries of their freedom of action. Perhaps also because the more powerful avoid confrontations which might lead to testing such boundaries.

10. An organisation may vary in its adoption of bureaucratic norms, depending on the issue. Adherence to rules may be used in support of an important organisational value such as the avoidance of conflict, and an avoidance of rules or a flexibility in their use may be used in support of other values such as that of "fair play".

11. Both the rigid adherence to, and flexible use of rules may be used as political resources but such tactics will be counter-productive if used when the prevailing view is that they are inappropriate. Where powerful organisational members adopt anti-bureaucratic values, appeal to rules will tend to be a weak argument unless there are legal implications (i.e. an external source of power) in support of it. Rules may also be used as a post-hoc justification of a decision.

12. The adoption of anti-bureaucratic values by powerful organisational members can facilitate their manipulation of decisions in line with their own interests by increasing the level of uncertainty surrounding issues in decision-making.

13. The quality of interaction in decision-making depends on the personalities of those who occupy decision-making roles, and this in turn affects the extent to which the management process is democratic. Someone with a high need for personal dominance, with skills of advocacy and who interprets the situation as calling for forceful expression of views, is likely to adopt a conflictful style of interaction with others. Alternatively, a person with a high need for power based on identification with authority figures, whose skills are more in the maintenance of order than in personal expression, and who sees the situation as calling for behind-the-scenes manipulation of events, is likely to adopt the low-profile approach in dealing with others. These are just two examples, but it can be suggested that people's political behaviour depends on a mixture of their intrinsic needs, and their interpersonal and cognitive skills and perceptions, as well as on contextual factors such as their place in the power structure. Included in their cognitive skills can be suggested a preferred way of thinking about phenomena which may be influenced by their specialist training.

14. People's intrinsic needs and values affect their reactions to the behaviour of others, so that the overt expression of differences or feelings can be seen by one person as a necessary part of the democratic process, and by another as a sign of weakness in management.

15. The structuring of the organisation can have the effect of blocking some views and values out of decision-making arenas, and make it possible for some organisation members to avoid coming to terms with dissenting views, thereby enabling them to maintain their

preferred view of reality. The unwillingness, for whatever reason, of dissenting members to become involved in the decision-making process also helps to maintain this view.

16. Where decisions are repeatedly made over time, rather than being "one-off" decisions, this fact can be used as a political resource.

17. Some perceptions of the concept of power which emerge are:

(a) Being democratic (that is, sharing power) is being informal.

(b) "Politics" needs a formal arena - or at any rate, is a lot more difficult without one. It is also undermined if representation has to be shared with someone else. This suggests a highly ego-centric view of political activity.

(f) Theoretical implications. The research findings in this section reflect on the ways in which values are related to power and political interaction and also on the transitional nature of the culture of the organisation studied.

The data support a symbolic interactionist view of political behaviour (see Chapter 2, section 2) in that they show how powerful people can define, and in this case re-define, what is to be considered of importance in the organisation (for example, doing research) but also how individuals and Groups can then seek to negotiate a definition of this value in ways which suit their own interests. For example, they can seek to define what "doing research" is to mean in such a way as to justify their own activities, and perhaps attack those of others. The difficulties of obtaining a consensus about what is to be valued may be related to an underlying conflict of pragmatic interests (such as competition for resources) and the possibility which the values present for re-definition (for example, because "research" is not a clearly definable concept) and therefore a shift in the power balance. It is not necessarily the case, however, that the potential for making this adjustment is fully realised by disadvantaged individuals or Groups. There are also indications that where the definition of what is to be valued is tied to rewards - i.e. is given a political significance - there is the possibility that a facade of compliance will be used by organisation members, raising questions about what is "real" and what is "false" behaviour, as suggested in the literature mentioned in Chapter 2, sections 2 and 4. One could see this as a failure of A to control B, but one in which

B appears to be complying, and therefore being controlled by A. The real meaning of B's activities and of the interaction between A and B therefore bec omes uncertain. It is interesting to note that B may not need to take any positive action to deliberately mislead A, since A may misinterpret B's actions in a way which favours B, a misinterpretation which B need not take any steps to rectify.

Although the literature about power suggests that the values of those who have power will prevail (see Chapter 2, section 4), the present study suggests that there can be difficulty for organisation members in predicting whose values will prevail in relation to a given issue. This may arise from the difficulty they may have in knowing who is going to make the decision about the issue (who has the power), whether this is an individual or a number of individuals, and what criteria will be applied in making the decision - i.e. what do the powerful consider important, what values do they hold? Ambiguity in the information they do receive about the decision-making process - for example, information about the outcome of a decision to which different meanings can be attached - may lead them to make false assumptions about the decision-making process and how to influence it. The absence or ambiguity of information makes it difficult for A to influence B, where B has power but it is not clear who B is or what will influence B. This provides an illustration of the importance of information as a political resource, as found also by Pettigrew (1973).

The data suggest that the way information is disseminated within the organisation may be subject to norms about how much information people

should have and who should be given what kinds of information. It is suggested that these norms are likely to work to the advantage of the more powerful, so that if information is seen as likely to cause conflict, and conflict is considered harmful to them, information will be limited. However, the way in which the structure of the organisation, which is seen in the literature as having political implications (see Chapter 2, section 3), can provide or limit access to information is also suggested by this study. In particular, where group norms diverge, this may include norms about the sharing of information, so that from a political point of view it can matter which Group you belong to, even among Groups of similar status in the overall structure, in that politically useful information may be more widely shared in some Groups than in others.

The literature of power suggests an ambivalence among authors towards having and exercising power (see Chapter 2, section 4 pp 77 et seq). In this study there were indications that political behaviour was not entirely approved of. For example, political behaviour in the form of competitiveness with others was confined to particular issues, or particular circumstances (for example, competition with other Groups rather than between Group members). It was also inhibited because it was seen as conflicting with other valued activities, such as the dissemination of knowledge, or the avoidance of conflict. Where such values were not shared, particularly among the more powerful organisation members, competitive behaviour was evident, though frowned on by others. Such cases, exemplify the grey area between the legitimate opportunism of the

astute politician and the unacceptable infringement of norms, discussed in Chapter 2 section 5.

Apart from the problems of determing how to influence others and whether particular instances of political behaviour are legitimate or not, there is also the question raised by the data of what an apparently political activity means to the participants. The data show that people have the capacity to shift the meaning of events, (such as competitions for resources) either by prior intent or post hoc adjustment to the outcome, thus obscuring the reality of what they are doing.

The data suggest that norms in the organisation about how conflict should be dealt with, and values which encourage conflict avoidance, lead to strategies for handling conflict which can make it difficult for organisation members to deal with the political processes. It can be suggested that these strategies may not allow conflicts to be freely articulated and therefore obscure the issues in contention, or indeed help to prevent conflicts of interest from coming into the conscious focus of organisation members, as suggested in Chapter 2, section 3 p.69). A consensus of norms about conflict-avoidance can also facilitate the incidence of non-decision-making, in that contentious issues are kept out of decision-making agendas. (Bachrach and Baratz (1962); Lukes (1974)). There was also evidence that organisation structures, for example a hierarchy of committees, may have the effect of keeping potential protagonists apart, and therefore reducing the possibility of overt conflict, and also of making clear where the conflicts of interest are. This supports

Crozier's (1964) view that organisation structure can limit the struggle for power (see Chapter 2, section 3).

This question of norms about dealing with conflict also has a bearing on the way in which people can have political potential which they do not use, as discussed in the literature (see Chapter 2, section 2 p.63 and section 4). This study suggests that people may be unwilling to be involved in political processes either because these are seen as being incongruent with their interests in behaving in ways which accord with their values, or because involvement in such processes is seen as being against their pragmatic interests. Wanting a quiet life, or wanting to apply your time and energy to activities other than the political processes of the organisation (for example, research rather than committee membership) can make you unwilling to behave politically in some ways or make use of some political opportunities available to you. This issue of the willingness of people to be involved in a power struggle is also suggested by the literature, see Chapter 2, section 2, and suggests the relevance of motivation theory to political behaviour.

The data show that whether you see yourself as powerful, or see others as powerful, depends on the ideas you have about power. For example, whether you consider power to be a zero-sum phenomenon, so that if you share leadership or representation with others, you yourself become less powerful, less able to influence others, and what criteria you adopt for identifying power or powerlessness in others. Is lobbying or consultation a sign of political weakness or strength? It seems reasonable to assume that people will act in

accordance with the concepts of power they hold when trying to influence events, but that other people will put a different interpretation on their behaviour if they do not share these concepts. For example, if you value democratic behaviour but equate democracy with being informal, your actions may be seen as undemocratic by others who have a different view of democracy. It is also suggested that the way people see the nature of the political system may depend on their vantage point, whether from a position of personal autonomy they observe the forms of democracy, or whether from a position of close involvement in the political processes they find themselves able to influence events.

Some further issues concerning the relationship between autonomy and power emerge from the study. It is suggested in Chapter 2, section 4, that there is a difficulty about relating the need for personal autonomy and the need to influence others, and this dilemma was reflected in the data over the question of who ought to be consulted and who ought to decide about what. The suggestion is that it is possible for people to resolve this dilemma in ways which suit their interests, perhaps by reference to some superordinate value. This can be seen also as an attempt to establish a pecking-order between different Groups in the organisation in a way which favours your Group, by reference to the purpose of the institution as you define it.

Section 5 of chapter 2 considers the relationship of rules to power as discussed in the literature, and the field-work data also reflect on this relationship. The data suggest that rules have an impact on the political process in that people may be uncertain whether the

rules exist, or, if they exist whether they apply. However, because some people are more powerful than others in relation to an issue, it matters who thinks they apply or do not. It is further suggested that rules, and their uncertainties, can be used as a political resource. Undermining the certainty about rules, so that they may or may not be applied, creates one of those ambiguous situations which, according to Dalton (1959) the strong quickly turn to their needs.

5. Conclusion

It has been suggested in this chapter that the research data reflect in a number of ways on the existing literature of power. Given the diverse nature of the power literature and its lack of grounding in field-work, and of attention to the perceptions of organisational actors, it is not to be expected that any tidy relationship between the existing theory and this study can be made. However, it will be seen that a number of themes emerge from the data which are relevant to existing theory, and in this section these are drawn together by looking at what the research reveals about the opportunities which the organisational setting can present, so that actors are enabled to pursue their own interests, "the chance to carry through one's will", as Weber (in Walliman et al (1980)) has called it, and how these are related to existing theory.

Criticism of the A-B model of power discussed in Chapter 2, section 2, suggested that it was limited by its lack of reference to the context of the A-B relationship. This criticism was supported by the present study which shows how the context (and the actors' interpretation of it) provided political opportunities for both A and B. It can be suggested that these opportunities are derived both from the structural characteristics of the organisation, and the values which underpin and are supported by that structure. In Chapter 2, section 3, the difference of opinion as to whether structures or individuals can be said to have power was discussed. In this study organisational participants reported both views, some talking of parts of the

structure such as the Senate as having power, and others talking of individuals having power. Although it could be argued that these are simply handy ways of talking about political phenomena, rather than carefully thought out terms, nevertheless it is suggested that the use of particular conceptual models can affect the ways in which people think about their organisational context, a point which will be returned to again.

Power was acquired by individuals in this study by what can be called structural means, but it was also suggested that structure may be more a matter of perceptions than of facts, and there is therefore a difficulty about saying as Bacharach and Lawler (1980) do that power derives from the group (see Chapter 2, section 3). It could be suggested instead that structure provides opportunities of various kinds for individuals to pursue their self-interest, and the nature of that opportunity is conditioned by the culture of the organisation. In the organisation studied for this research, power did not in the main derive from the group, except in the most general sense of the support provided to the individual's actions by a consensus of values, which form the basis for the organisation's existence (the idea of the academic community, for example). Although some organisational roles conferred considerable amounts of power on the role-holders, and provided access to group membership, they did not necessarily participate closely in groups, or even depend much on the opinion of group members. This seemed particularly true of the professorial role, in that it was possible for a professor to feel that he hardly knew his professorial colleagues,

or that he could largely disregard the feelings of his staff. However, where groups consisted of a patron and protege, it could be said that power was derived from such a group, and where groups were formed for decision-making purposes, group members derive power from having the opportunity to influence the decision.

Structural questions such as where role boundaries should be drawn, affect the domain of power of the individual, and it has been suggested that the representation system integrating the structure may also by chance provide greater political opportunities for some individuals and groups than others. The research findings support the idea found in the literature (see Chapter 2, section 3) of the ways in which structure both facilitates and constrains political interaction. However, the relationship of structures and values has also been commented on in the literature, (see Chapter 2, section 4) and it can be suggested from this research that the values of those who have power will prevail, and also that those whose values prevail will have power, as discussed in that section. Once a view of what the structure should be like has crystallised into formal procedures (for example, an Area system rather than a Faculty system) some people may find that their voices, and therefore their values, will have been structured out of important decision-making arenas. This is one of the ways in which values also play a part in providing or constraining political opportunity. It is also suggested that once values have been established as part of the culture, it may be difficult to know whether these operate as criteria for decisions or as justifications for them. In other words, they become political

resources or opportunities for the pursuit of self-interest.

Dependence has been a recurring theme in the literature of power (see Chapter 2, section 2), and this study has shown considerable variety in the strength, nature and perception of dependence in different parts of the organisation. Some people were able to be relatively independent of other organisation members, either because their role provided considerable autonomy, or because they were able to obtain resources from outside the organisation, so that they had diffused their dependency - a strategy suggested by Dalton et al (1968) (see Chapter 2, section 2). In some cases it was seen that by a combination of having the opportunity of choosing between multiple roles (technical, group and organisational) and having low task dependence on other individuals or Groups, and therefore a high level of autonomy, some people had considerable opportunity for pursuing their self-interest successfully. It was suggested by this research that, in such circumstances, people could gain power without the commitment to the organisation itself which Zalznic (1968) in Dalton et al has suggested, but could ignore, devalue or reject an organisational role, and perhaps also a Group role, and concentrate their energies almost entirely on a technocal role. This, together with their access to external resources in effect represented a "strategic contingency" route to power, (See Chapter 2, section 3) since the bringing in of these external resources (such as large research grants) was considered important by the more powerful members of the organisation. It is also suggested by this research that when people gain power by this means, their domain of power may be extended beyond their technical role, if the reward system of the organisation

confers on them status and hence other roles. This consequence may turn out to be seen as being against the interests of other organisation members, if they perceive these additional roles to be ineffectively or improperly played. This process by which people can use opportunities for gaining power which arise outside the organisation as well as within it, also supports the view discussed in the literature (see Chapter 2, section 4) that people gain power by conforming to, or sharing, the values of the powerful.

The tension which may exist between wanting independence or autonomy for oneself, but dependence for others, was discussed in Chapter 2, section 4, and was exemplified in this research by the suggestion that group A should be able to make decisions independently of group B, but that the reverse should not be true. It can be suggested from the foregoing discussion that the successful use of opportunities to gain power by some people can have the effect of constraining the opportunities of others. The research does not, however, reveal whether this imbalance in autonomy has any effect on the psychological health of either the more or the less autonomous, an issue which is discussed in the literature (see Chapter 2, section 4).

It has been suggested that the organisational context, which may include elements external to the organisation, provides the individual with opportunities for gaining and exercising power. However, it must be added that such opportunities depend on the perceptions of organisational participants of this context, which may be characterised by considerable ambiguity. There may, for example, be ambiguity about the existence of structures, or whether rules really apply,

or about what is valued by the powerful. It has further been suggested that this uncertainty may in itself become a political opportunity, in that an attempt can be made to establish a definition of reality in line with one's own interests, as Dalton (1959) has noted. But this process of interpretation and definition is not without its constraints, since, as discussed in Chapter 2, section 4, and exemplified in this study, it is subject to the influence of group norms, a factor which may be brought to light by the perceptions and behaviour of newcomers to the organisation who are not yet socialised into the group's way of defining reality. These norms may also include the classification of some types of power (such as authority or coercion in this case) as unusable. It can be said therefore that political opportunity may be diminished by constraints on perceptions, and on the actions which may legitimately be taken.

One major uncertainty in the context of the individual is the cause-and-effect relationship in the behaviour of others, to which Dahl (1968) has drawn attention. This creates a problem in interpreting the behaviour of others and therefore understanding how to influence them. Examples in this study, were the difficulty of determining the criteria others applied in making decisions and the problem of distinguishing which role was being played by a committee member. Doubt about cause and effect may make it difficult to apply the right inducements to get B to act as A wishes, and even if B does so act, it is not necessarily any proof that it was because of the inducement, or for some other reason unknown to A. The outcome of influence attempts may depend on the anticpated reactions of others

outside the A-B relationship. The non-compliance of B may be due to B's interpretation of how C will react if B does what A wants. For example, people trying to persuade a Decider in this study that their application for a research grant merits an A grading may be thwarted by the Decider's perception of how a powerful colleague would react to a rearrangement of the rankings of applications. This perception by B may be entirely unknown to A, but may prevent B from acting as he or she would prefer. The cause of B's behaviour might be said to include a prediction of how C will react, and a personal value or adherence to a norm against conflict, or even a perceived political opportunity to secure the support of C over another issue. As noted in Chapter 2, section 5, taking opportunities to pursue your own interests may involve accepting adverse reactions from others, and although some people in the present study were prepared to risk this, particularly if they were in positions of considerable strength, as has been shown, avoidance of conflict was a norm. The research therefore supports Bacharach and Lawler's (1980) contention that the subjective judgements of A, not only about whether sanctions (negative or positive) will be applied, but also whether they will have the required effect, are important factors in A's attempt to influence B, but suggest also that these factors should be seen as arising from a wider network of relationships which form the context of A and B.

It can be added that B's capacity to resist A's demands may include a capacity for false compliance, and that the uncertainty of cause and effect and difficulty of interpreting the context may be compounded by the ways in which people may shift the meaning for themselves of

organisational events (such as competition for resources) or obscure them for others by withholding of information (such as information about the criteria for ranking research applications). These shifts in meaning, whether psychological or tactical, are similar to those discussed in the literature in Chapter 2, sections 2 and 4.

It has been suggested in the literature that information control is important to effective political action (see for example Pettigrew (1973)) and this view is supported by this research which shows that information sharing may be limited both by the structure, which may formally or informally restrict who talks to whom, and by people's values about the extent and type of information which should be shared. Bacharach and Aiken (1976) suggest that the more powerful members of an organisation have a problem in trying to gaim information from lower participants without losing control (see Chapter 2, section 4) and it could be seen in this present study that there were some kinds of information - such as signs of discontent over the change in policy - which some Deciders would rather disregard, and some people felt that the more powerful did not want to know of their views or problems. This would suggest that selective attention to information from lower participants, or the less powerful, was the strategy adopted by some of the more powerful, and it is difficult to see how, in this case, making a distinction between authority and influence would resolve the problem as Bacharach and Aiken (1976) suggest. Allowing greater influence in decision-making among lower participants would seem more likely to further blurr the identification of who was making the decision, and therefore erode the authority of the higher

eschelons, particularly in a culture where gaining compliance through the direct use of authority was generally frowned on.

The possibility of maintaining both the goodwill and the compliance of B referred to in Chapter 2, section 5 may be affected by B's perception of the structure (for example, can these representatives in this part of the structure credibly make these decisions) and hence have implications for the perceived legitimacy of A's power when this is based on the structure. It is suggested in the literature that willing compliance may also result from a congruence of values between A and B (see Chapter 2, section 4) and there were examples in this study of such congruence, for example, when the change to a research orientation coincided with an individual's interests in doing research. However, there was no sign of an unthinking compliance which seems to be the way in which some writers think of authority, (see Chapter 2, section 4, page 74) and indeed Deciders in this case tended not to see any of the forms of authority discussed in that section as usable ways of getting the compliance of B, although their role clearly gave them rights to decide. The research shows also that B's compliance may be affected by the strength of B's commitment to the enterprise (as discussed in Chapter 2, section 4) and the nature of that commitment, It was in particular noted that some people had little commitment to the organisation as such, i.e. to playing an organisational as well as technical role, and might comply or fail to comply for that reason - for example, by accepting the judgement of the RFC and not taking the trouble to find out why an application had been turned down, or by throwing all internal memos into the waste-paper basket on principle.

It can be suggested therefore that being able to make effective use of the opportunities presented by the organisational context of pursuing one's self-interest, through gaining the compliance of others, can depend on the values and percpeptions of the parties concerned, which will affect the interpretation of whether compliance has in fact been achieved, how others may be influenced, whether a political process is legitimate, whether values are congruent and what is the extent and likely effect of an individual's motivation and commitment to the organisation. Perceived incongruence of values might be used to justify an imbalance of power, so as to align the organisation with what is perceived by the more powerful to be the "reality" of environmental demands (see Chapter 2, section 4).

The sharing of information was also limited in this study by a cultural norm through which conflict was generally avoided, so that the confrontation of contentious information was either avoided altogether, or restricted to being dealt with in particular parts of the structure.

It is suggested by this research that information is particularly important for political opportunity, not only as it affects "the ignorance of B", but also in its effect on the individual's perception of the organisational context within which self-interest is to be pursued. Interpreting the context is not a neutral activity, but guided also by conceptual models which the perceiver uses, so that, for example, one person may interpret consultation by a leader with subordinates as a sign of relative powerlessness in the leader, and

another may interpret it as political astuteness. Whatever the interpretation, the research also suggests that political skill is also required in order to make the most of the opportunities offered. If, for example, acting effectively in the Senate does require the skills of advocacy, it is not enough to perceive that. One also needs to be a good advocate. It has been suggested in Chapter 2, section 4, that it is important to ensure that your definitions of reality prevail, and it can be suggested that particular skills which match the ways in which people can be influenced are necessary in order to bring this about. The general nature of the behavioural repertoire an individual has, for example being predominantly "high profile" or "low key" may affect others' perceptions of the power of that individual and therefore his or her political effectiveness.

It has been suggested in Chapter 2, section 3, that the timing of influence attempts, particularly in situations where the salience of particular issues may be changing, is important to effective political behaviour, and one could say that this is a necessary political skill. As will be shown in the next chapter, the participation in recurring rather than one-off events, and the structuring of time in general, have a bearing on the acquisition of both political opportunities and skills. (See Chapter 4, Section 4(a)).

Effective political behaviour, can be seen as depending on the interpretation of the organisational context, which includes interpretation of the structure, the cultural norms and the behaviour of others in the organisation. This interpretation is affected by

the information you have, and the conceptual models you adopt, and the outcome is conditioned by the skills you have in acting on your interpretation. Since political behaviour is a process between individuals, the outcome for any individual depends also on the interactions between people who are all similarly engaged in making interpretations and acting on these. This research has shown that different people make different interpretations of the same phenomena, and that this circumstance may be unknown to organisational participants. The research therefore supports the symbolic interactionist view of politics, but suggests that negotiation over meanings is facilitated by ambiguity, because there is no obvious right answer, but only the answer which prevails. The ability to deal with ambiguity is therefore a necessary political skill. However, the idea of "negotiated" meanings is perhaps a misnomer, because it suggests that differences in interpretation are recognised and confronted, but this research suggests that this may not be the case.

Organisational ambiguity is a major theme which has emerged from this study. It is a theme which does not appear much in the literature about power (Dalton et al (1968) would be an example) although it is found to some extent as a variable in organisational literature, for example, as a factor in decision-making (March and Olsen (1976)). From this present research it can be suggested that ambiguity is present in the organisation in two main ways. It appears as uncertainty of which the participants are aware and with which they may have to contend in taking political action. Uncertainty about whether or not sanctions exist would be an example of this.

However, there is also ambiguity of which organisation members may be unaware because they lack information about possible alternative interpretations, but differences in interpretation are nevertheless a factor in the political processes in the organisation, both in their implications for creating conflict and in opportunities which have been missed because one view has been taken for granted as the only reality.

There is very little discussion in the literature about ambiguity as a concept, or of its relation to organisational politics. In Chapter 4 I shall therefore suggest a way of understanding the concept of ambiguity which shows how ambiguity is of political significance, both in the way it arises in the organisation and in the political opportunity it provides for organisation members. Examples from the field data will be used to illustrate the ideas put forward, and to maintain the grounding of the theory in the field research. It will be seen that some of the major themes of relevance to the study of power, and which have been discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 will again reappear, though in some instances with a different orientation. So, for example, the structural aspects of organisational politics reappear subsumed under the heading of information processes, thus emphasising the impact of structure on the information which the individual receives and hence on the individual's interpretation of organisational phenomena. To some extent the theory presented in Chapter 4 goes beyond the data of the field research, and represents a hypothesis for which evidence is provided, but which would also repay further study.

CHAPTER 4

THE POLITICS OF AMBIGUITY

1. Introduction

It was suggested in the previous chapter that ambiguity was a major theme which emerged from the field research, and the political significance of this characteristic of the organisation studied will be examined in this chapter. However, it is first necessary to consider the concept of ambiguity itself. Although ambiguity is found as a concept in social science theory, there appears to be little analysis of it. March and Olsen (1976) and their contributors make use of the concept as a variable in decision-making, and although they attempt a definition of it, this is limited to identifying some ambiguous phenomena in the organisation, rather than saying what ambiguity is.

Discussion of ambiguity in other fields, such as literary criticism (Empson (1930), Kris and Kaplan (1952)) the history of ideas (Toshiro (1973)) and the history of art (Gombrich (1963)) throws light on the topic, although these ideas are not entirely transferable to the field of organisational behaviour. However, these authors are concerned with the problem of interpretation of ambiguous phenomena, and as has been shown in Chapter 3, interpretation is an important factor in political behaviour in an organisation. Moreover, they are concerned with ambiguity within a particular context, such as a poem or a painting, and therefore have more relevance to organisational politics than, for example, the writing on the subject by philosophers such as Lacey (1976) or Altham (1980), who seem mainly concerned with ambiguities of logic, devoid of context. As has been shown

in the preceding chapter, political perceptions and interactions are best considered within their organisational context.

In this chapter I shall start by attempting to clarify the concept of ambiguity, and then take a political perspective in suggesting how it arises in the organisation and how it affects people's behaviour. The ideas present here will build on the analysis of the field data and the theoretical implications of the previous chapter, and also, where applicable, on the literature mentioned above.

The numbers in brackets which appear in the text in sections 3 and 4 of this chapter refer to the notes at the end of each sub-section. These notes relate the material in this chapter to the research findings in Chapter 3 and, in some cases, to the literature review in Chapter 2. For page numbers to aid cross-referencing, see the contents page at the beginning of this thesis. A summary of the issues discussed and the main reflection on existing theory of power is given at the end of sections 3 and 4. Section 5 is a general conclusion to the Chapter.

2. Ambiguity

Ambiguity refers to a particular kind of uncertainty in the meaning of a phenomenon. The meaning is uncertain because the phenomenon is capable of two or more interpretations, which may or may not be mutually exclusive. It is not possible to determine a "correct" reading from among these alternatives, although it is possible to decide, consciously or unconsciously which reading you will take to be the correct one, and to try to persuade others to agree with your view.

Ambiguity should not be thought of as "all in the mind", unrelated to any reality outside the perceiver. The ambiguous phenomenon has itself characteristics which render it capable of alternative interpretations, all of which are justifiable. Ambiguity arises partly as a perception by the individual and partly as a characteristic of the organisational phenomena with which the individual is dealing.

Abstract ideas such as "organisation", and notions about the composition and operation of organisations, are inherently ambiguous. The organisation is rather like an ink-blot into which people read meanings, but unlike an ink-blot it will react to any action the individual takes on the basis of such readings. It is therefore possible for organisation members to test out the meanings they assign to organisational phenomena as a check on the efficacy of their interpretations, although such tests are problematic as I shall show.

An ambiguous phenomenon need not be perceived as such by every individual who perceives the phenomenon, since the individual may be unaware of possible alternative readings which could be assigned to it, and perhaps are assigned to it by others. Consequently an organisational phenomenon may appear ambiguous to a researcher collecting views of it from different people, but not to the individual interviewees themselves.

Since so much of what happens in an organisation is language-based, it is relevant to consider how a classification of types of ambiguity, developed in the field of literary criticism, can be useful to a study of ambiguity in organisations. Kris and Kaplan (1952) (drawing on the work of Empson (1930)) in writing about ambiguity in poetry, distinguish between disjunctive, additive, conjunctive, interpretive, projective, decorative and expressive ambiguities. Of these, the additive, conjunctive and integrative categories seem very similar, and can be subsumed under the title "cumulative" ambiguity, in that they all involve the accumulation of meanings which do not exclude each other. Disjunctive ambiguities are mutually exclusive. In projective ambiguity, the variation in meaning depends upon the interpreter. I assume this to be a reference to the point of view that the poet's intention is unknowable or irrelevant, and that what matters is what the poem means to the reader, the poem therefore being a different poem to different readers. Decorative ambiguity exists when meanings have no bearing on the immediate context - Kris and Kaplan cite the plays on words in Shakespeare as examples of this. Expressive ambiguity involves psychic distance between the face value of the words and their meaning.

Too little psychic distance and a poem becomes mere propaganda "pragmatic rather than aesthetic", too much psychic distance and the poem is either unintelligible or will be interpreted by the reader only at the face-value level.

In applying these classifications of ambiguity to social interactions in an organisation, it can be suggested that cumulative ambiguity exists when there is doubt about what is to be included in a phenomenon, and can be viewed as a measure of potential or perceived complexity. For example, the interpretation of the Senate as a "ratifying" committee, could include the idea that it is simply a "rubber stamp" for all decisions brought to it from other groups, and that it might interfere with the work of a School, and that it can be manipulated by particular individuals. Varying degrees of power can be implied in the "ratifying" view of the Senate, and this would be an example of cumulative ambiguity about its political position.

An example of disjunctive ambiguity is found in the opinions expressed about the relative powerfulness of the Senate and the Council, one informant seeing the Senate as the more powerful of the two, another saying that the Council had the greater power. In this instance the phenomenon (relative power) is ambiguous in a disjunctive way, since if one view of it is correct, the other is untenable.

If one accepts the phenomenologists' view that the line to be drawn between what is subjective and what (if anything) is objective is problematic (Thines (1977); Koch (1964); Spiegleberg (1967)), one

can say that all organisational ambiguities are to some extent projective in that they are in part created by the interpreter. An example of a high degree of projective ambiguity might be found where a person who consciously adopts political strategies in organisational interactions - perhaps by manipulating meetings to obtain decisions that he or she wants - might wrongly assume similar intentions in other people and therefore read into their behaviour meanings which make that behaviour ambiguous for the interpreter.

Expressive ambiguities in the organisation can occur when a symbolic meaning exists alongside the face-value meaning of a phenomenon. In this research it was reported that having a car-parking space with your name on it meant, not only that a space had been allocated for your car, but in one instance also symbolised high status in the organisation and the ability to survive changes in power structure. In this case, the expressive ambiguities are cumulative. Expressive ambiguities can also be disjunctive however. It could be said that one way of including people in a decision-making process, when they do not have the right to be present at formal meetings, is to circulate minutes of those meetings to such people. For one of my informants, however, being offered the opportunity to see the minutes of Senate meetings simply underlined the fact that he was excluded from membership of the Senate, to which he felt he should have belonged as of right. What on the face of it was an act of inclusion in decision-making, symbolised exclusion for the organisation member concerned.

In this research I did not come across ambiguities which I would consider to be of the purely "decorative" type, but this may be because in social interaction in organisations it would be difficult

to substantiate the view that any words are "irrelevant" to the substantive issues, unless they are serving some symbolic purpose, as covered by the "expressive" category. Even when people choose to talk in colourful metaphors - for example, by referring to groups of people as "white hens and red hens" - there are a number of purposes which such language can serve in influencing the interpretation of the listener, projecting a self image, creating a conversational climate, quite apart from its function in conveying meaning relating to the substantive issue. Although it is possible that words and images may be used for their intrinsic pleasure as well as, or in spite of, any other meaning they are intended to convey, I have not found the "decorative" category very useful in this analysis of ambiguity, because of the difficulty of establishing irrelevance.

March and Olsen (1976) identify four different types of "organisational opaqueness" by which they define ambiguity. These are, ambiguities of intention, understanding, history and organisation. By ambiguity of intention, they mean that the organisation has inconsistent and unclear objectives. They also talk of the organisation as having "motivation" (p.55) and "intelligence" (p.54), but it would be more consistent with the view of the organisation suggested by this research to consider "objectives", "motives" and "intelligence" as characteristics of individuals, rather than of the abstract concept "organisation". Ambiguity in the intentions of individuals as a factor in organisational politics will be discussed later in this chapter.

Ambiguity of understanding, in March and Olsen's scheme, refers to ambiguity of cause and effect. Technologies being unclear and environments difficult to interpret, it is difficult to see connections between the organisation's actions and their consequences. Again, removing the imputation of personality from the organisation and returning it to the individual, and taking a political view, issues involved in assessing cause and effect in organisational politics will be returned to later. Meanwhile, one can suggest that "understanding" is rather too broad a term when ambiguity of causes is referred to, since there are other phenomena to be "understood" besides cause and effect. Ambiguity of history refers to the difficulty of specifying what happened, and why, in the past, since history can be reconstructed or twisted. This category could be subsumed under a general category of temporal ambiguity, since it is not only the past, but also the future which is ambiguous, and the question of ambiguity arising out of the passage of time will be turned to later in this chapter. In their classification, March and Olsen are not so much defining ambiguity as drawing attention to certain organisational phenomena which are particularly relevant to decision-making as they see it, and where there is a lack of clarity or certainty for decision-makers. My orientation in this chapter is to consider ambiguity in the organisation in a broader sense, and to relate it to organisational politics.

Drawing together the various types of ambiguity which have been discussed so far, the following table can be suggested (see Figure 5). Ambivalence has been included in the classification because this concept deals specifically with uncertainty about the <u>value</u> to be

attached to a phenomenon and can be seen as a useful sub-set of ambiguity, in making a distinction between ambiguity of fact and ambiguity of value. For example, money can be seen as both a beneficial and corrupting resource, but this is different from ambiguity of what money actually is.

Figure 5

Types of ambiguity/ ambivalence		Disjunctive	Cumulative
Projective			
Expressive			
Temporal:	Prospective		
	Retrospective		

This classification attempts to capture the perceptual process between the individual interpreter and the ambiguous phenomena, without specifying particular organisational phenomena as part of the classification. It should therefore be possible for any ambiguous phenomenon in the organisation to be classified in the appropriate boxes in the table.

Talking about "facts" tends to lead towards the metaphysical quagmire of argument about whether anything can be proved to exist. However, for the purposes of this chapter, it will be assumed that, since there is so great a consensus about the existence of some organisational phenomena, and it would be so difficult to find

non-perceivers of them, such phenomena can be taken for granted as really existing. It is suggested that such a consensus is more likely to apply to physical objects than to abstract ideas, and this point will be returned to in the next section. Meanwhile, although no consensus however complete should be regarded as sacrosanct, this chapter only deals with some of the possible examples of ambiguity in an organisation, those which were brought to my attention in the field study, and these will be used to try to throw some light on how organisational ambiguity relates to organisational politics.

There were three general groups of issues, all to do with the exercise of power and the power structure which could be identified in the present study; each of which had corresponding ambiguities:

(a) Generalised philosophical principles.

(b) The process of exercising power, and

(c) Specific outcomes at a point in time.

The corresponding ambiguities were:

(a) Ambivalence about whether a leader ought to control a group, how much control there should be over the individual or whether individual autonomy is to be promoted wherever possible. Is control of the individual by the leader - i.e. a considerable imbalance in the power structure - an indication of effective leadership conducive to the maintenance of high standards? Or an oppressive imposition of a minority view of phenomena, creating unnecessary conflict?

Should the democracy or autocracy apply to all issues and circumstances, and include all individuals or groups, or should some form of mixed culture be attempted? Many of these ambiguities are of the cumulative type, reflecting uncertainty about what should be included in the concept of democracy.

(b) How in practice is the power structure implemented and power exercised? Ambiguities (often of the disjunctive type) could be found in the present study, over where decisions were actually being made, whether power resided with individuals or with groups such as committees, whether one such group was more powerful than another, whether particular individuals were powerful, and whether they were allied to particular groups or not. There was also ambiguity about whether certain rules, and certain negative and positive sanctions really applied, and what was the precise nature of a threat, where danger to an individual was perceived. There were also ambiguities about how to "get on" in the organisation and whether the individual's contribution would be recognised and valued, i.e. did the individual really have political resources?

(c) Some examples were found of ambivalence about the outcomes for the individual of a current political situation or decision. So, a particular form of leadership could be seen as a mixed blessing, and some doubts existed as to whether particular groups were at a political advantage or not. There was also some ambivalence about whether the perceived absence of democracy was a good or a bad thing.

It can be added that ambiguity can be found at different levels in the organisation. For example, some concepts used pervasively in the system may be ambiguous, or ambiguity may be found in the very purpose of the organisation itself, making it difficult to answer such questions as "what is a university?" in a way which satisfies all parties. At other levels, ambiguity may be found in the role and activities of decision-making groups, or in the thinking and behaviour of particular individuals, or in the interactions between individuals. It may be a one-off occurrence, or a habitually present phenomenon. The ways in which ambiguity arises in the organisation and the ways in which people respond to it will be considered in the next sections.

3. The creation of ambiguity

In this section I shall look at ways in which ambiguity in organisational phenomena is created. I shall consider first the question of the difference between the uncertainty of ignorance and uncertainty of the ambiguous kind, then deal with the use of abstract concepts and the ways in which information processes, and the organisational characteristics which mould those processes, help to create ambiguity.

In cnnsidering ambiguity in organisations, it is useful to distinguish between situations where alternative perceptions are found because the phenomena are inherently ambiguous, and situations where alternative perceptions arise because of the ignorance of one of the parties.(1) Organisation members will sometimes impute ignorance of the facts to others whose perceptions do not match their own, and it is important to try to distinguish between such imputations which

are valid, and those which are not. Some examples will illustrate the difference, and the difficulty of making this distinction in some cases:

(a) Person A may claim that his name is first on the priority list for the allocation of Research Funds. Person B may deny that this is the case. The discrepancy could easily be resolved by both parties consulting the priority list, and one of them would be shown to be right.

(b) Person A claims that "the VC has frozen posts in social science..." but person B says that this is technically incorrect, since the VC does not have the authority to freeze posts on his own decision. In this case, although person A may be ignorant of the formal rules which apply to the freezing of posts, the perception that it is the VC who is really doing the freezing may be correct, since it is quite possible for a person to have enough influence to overcome the restraint of formal rules. There is no simple check which could be done to determine who is right here, and as I shall illustrate further in the following sections, such organisational situations should be seen as inherently ambiguous.

In example (a) above, there is a "right" answer, and it can be assumed that the original perceptions of A and B were derived from clues picked up from sources other than a reference to available "facts" (the list itself). However, if A and B are denied access to these facts, the ambiguity about A's position would remain, kept in being by political forces. As both examples show, organisational politics can prevent the resolution of uncertainty in organisational

phenomena, and three causes of such perceptual uncertainty can be suggested: false ambiguity based on removable ignorance; ambiguity manufactured by political forces; and inherent ambiguity. Only the last two will be considered as properly belonging to the concept of ambiguity.

In the following sections I shall discuss inherent and manufactured ambiguity, not as consequences of cognitive incapacity or inefficient communication channels (March and Olsen (1976) p.18) but as arising from the nature of organisational phenomena, from political processes, and from what might be called the limitations on inter-subjectivity - the impossibility of knowing for certain what are another's perceptions, intentions or even in some cases actions, and the considerable doubt which can be cast upon one's own.(2)

(a) Abstractions. Many of the phenomena of organisational life are abstract in nature, lacking physical reference and therefore particularly open to doubt as to their existence and operation. Abstract ideas, such as "structure" for example, while having considerable consequences in the organisation, have little tangibility. As far as formal structure is concerned, the physical separation of individuals into different sections of a building, the labelling of these groups by different names and constant reference to these names in speech and writing, the regular calling together of committee members and the writing of minutes about their discussions, all help to give credibility to the existence of structure, but nevertheless, large areas of this phenomenon elude the process of reification.

Informal structure is particularly difficult to pin down, and this research has shown that the very existence of "groups" within an organisation may be in doubt, it being possible for one person to perceive the existence of a group where another does not. Whereas it would be difficult to find anyone in doubt as to whether the buildings housing the organisation exist, it is not so difficult to find people in doubt about, or denying the existence of, some parts of a supposed structure.(3)

Abstract ideas are not subject to the same constraints as the physical world and this enhances the possibility of their being ambiguous.

In the physical world, for example, if you cut an orange in half you clearly no longer have a whole orange. However, with abstractions such as structure, it is possible to attempt to maintain the wholeness of a phenomenon while at the same time dividing it, so that it becomes unclear whether the "orange" is whole or not. So an attempt to divide academic decisions from resourcing decisions, though persistant in the organisation, may be always susceptible to being reversed, and the two kinds of decisions viewed as one. With abstract ideas, one person can continue to make distinctions which another denies, both with equal justification.

Organisation members give credibility to the existence of organisational abstractions by behaving as if they existed. However, by the same means, others may undermine this credibility. A role boundary, for example, might be maintained or denied or altered in this way. Similarly, organisation members can suggest, not only the existence

of phenomena, but also the value to be placed on such phenomena. The amount of effort they are prepared to make, or resources they are prepared to apply to a phenomenon can suggest whether they regard it as important or trivial.

Because of the abstract nature of organisational phenomena, and because organisations are interactive, in that the behaviour of one person has consequences for another, and because decisions have to be made, tensions can develop over the interpretations of the phenomena, both as to facts and values. Interpretations can become a crucial matter when they favour the interests of some individuals or groups and disadvantage others, and hence they give rise to political processes in which people seek to redefine or re-evaluate phenomenon or to maintain the status quo. For example, if "being a good academic" is defined as being primarily a good teacher,this definition will favour those who are, and want primarily to be, good teachers. When the role of the university is reinterpreted in a way which redefines "good academic" as "good researcher", the former elite group will lose out to a new group of research-oriented staff. Political processes develop over the attempt to establish the new interpretation and counter attempts will be made to maintain the existing one.(4)

Organisations are created by individuals (rather than being "found" in the universe) but because they are creations built largely on abstractions it should not be assumed that they have no reality. Their reality may be largely psychological, in that it is compsed of the perceptions, intentions and behaviour of people, but it is

none the less real for that. The problem is that the nature of that reality is not immutable and not always clear. What are assumed to be facts about the organisation may be no more than the outcome of a consensus to see the organisation that way.(4)

The concept of power is one of the abstractions about which people's perceptions can differ. Of all the possible ramifications of the concept, which were outlined in Chapter 2, in the field research a relatively limited view of organisational politics was found in use. The aspects of power focussed on tended to differ between the Deciders and Applicants groups, and it could be suggested that the more power you have in terms of authority and control of resources, the more you are aware of political behaviour as consisting in negotiation and manipulation. (The direct use of authority and coercion were not seen as "political" behaviour by most Deciders, who tended to regard those forms of power as taboo or unworkable). The less authority and control of resources you have the more you are aware of the power structure - the capacity of other individuals and groups to exercise authority over you and to control the resources you need. In general, people did not see <u>all</u> behaviour, but only certain kinds, as "political", and it was seen as largely a matter of choice whether you adopted this behaviour or not. One interesting variation was that if you have power you can <u>avoid</u> getting involved in politics but still get what you want, which I took to mean that resources would accrue to you without your having to make a special effort to obtain them in competition with others.(5)

This variety in understanding of the concept of power provides an example of the way in which abstractions in the organisation are given a particular character. One question which can be asked about them is the extent to which they are cumulatively ambiguous, or in other words, what degree of complexity or richness is attached to the meaning of the abstraction in the organisation. It can be suggested that abstractions in an organisation become endowed with particular meanings, and that these in turn influence the ways in which organisation members perceive and think about organisational phenomena. The absence of concrete referends for such abstractions allows for instability in meanings and enables ambiguity to be created, but there may be limitations on the creation of the range of meanings, as will be discussed further. It may be the case that different degrees of ambiguity would be found in different types of organisation, and if this is so, the degrees of complexity of interpretation required of organisation members will differ from one organisation type to another.

The next section will consider the ways in which the information process in the organisation affects the interpretations people make of ambiguous, and largely abstract, organisational phenomena.

Notes:

1. This question of ignorance relates to the notion of "the ignorance of B" discussed in Chapter 2, section 5, and again in Chapter 3, see for example the Conclusion to that chapter.

2. Dahl's (1968) contention that the cause and effect of political behaviour is problematic noted in Chapter 2, section6, was supported by the research findings, see Chapter 3, conclusions.

3. See Chapter 3, section 2. This question of ambiguity about "facts" casts the idea of "the ignorance of B" (see Chapter 2, section 5, and Chapter 3, section 4) in a new light, since it suggests that the political significance may be not in whether an individual knows the "facts", but whether he or she knows who interprets phenomena which way, and how powerful that person is.

4. This relates to the discussion of values in Chapter 2, section 4, and in Chapter 3, section 4(a) and Conclusions.

5. For examples of these views, see Chapter 3, section 4(e) and Inferences 1 and 17 for that section.

6. See for example the meanings attached to the concept "useful" Chapter 3, section 4(a), Inference 3.

(b) The information processes.

(i) Introduction. Because of the abstract nature of much that happens in an organisation, organisation members are dependent on clues provided by interaction with others for their understanding of the existence and nature of organisational phenomena. The giving and receiving of information provides the basis for this understanding, and information may come in the form of written statements, the spoken word or observation. Although some relatively factual information may be in existence, such as a written statement of the terms of reference of a committee, some organisation members may not be aware of, or have access to, such facts. Some people have more, and more useful, information than others, and some people actively seek information while others do not.(1)

Whatever their state of informedness, organisation members will use whatever information they happen to have in order to make assessments, whether consciously and deliberately or not, of the phenomena with which they find themselves involved. Organisation members can therefore come to widely different conclusions about their own or others' behaviour because they start from differing amounts and kinds of information. Whereas some information, such as that in the form of written statements, is potentially easily available provided one is aware of and has access to it, other information, such as the perceptions of other individuals about organisational situations, is more difficult to obtain. So, for example, a person who sees him or herself as acting under particular constraints, may be seen by others as acting on personal whim. If person X thinks he or she

is acting under constraints it is necessary to have that information regardless of whether the constraints really exist, in order to understand X's behaviour, but it is often the kind of information not available to person Y. Indeed, person Y may be unaware of some of the constraints on X which undoubtedly do exist - such as a reduction in budget by an external authority - as well as being unaware of person X's perception of what constraints are operating.(2) It can be safely said that no-one in the organisation has access to all the information, potentially available within it, which would be necessary for a complete understanding of organisational phenomena.

Given that organisation members act on the basis of what they perceive to be their self-interest, one important piece of information they need is the relationship of cause to effect in the interactive process, a relationship which this research has shown may be in considerable doubt. This relationship is crucial to political action, which necessitates making some assumptions about what will cause another person to act as one wants (or otherwise).(3) It has been suggested that information about how others perceive a situation is not usually fully available, and it can be added that people give or withhold information in accordance with what they perceive to be their self-interest, that is, they act politically in revealing or concealing their own perceptions. Moreover, people are not necessarily clear about the springs of their own actions, nor necessarily able to verbalise them, or in other ways provide information about them to others. Without full information about people's perceptions of

organisational phenomena it is not possible to be certain about the cause and effect of political action, and so there will always be some ambiguity about the political processes in organisations, and about such questions as how much power individuals have, or who influences who.

One factor which was found to affect the willingness of people to seek out information, was their attitudes to political behaviour as such. It was suggested by one person that obtaining information through informal discussion with a Decider might be "unfair", and by another that he wanted to be at a meeting to hear the arguments, but not so that he could influence events through having this information. It would seem that to some people, the deliberate acquisition of information for political purposes is 'hot cricket".(4)

One feature of an organisation is the potential it provides for the sharing of information between individuals.(5) Some organisation members at least, will be in a position to exchange information with each other about organisational phenomena - such information as they possess and are prepared to share. One result of this can be the perception by individuals that organisational phenomena are ambiguous, as they become aware that others see the same things differently. In so far as they are not persuaded to relinquish their own view, they remain aware that at least two interpretations of the same phenomena can be justified. So, for example, a person may feel in two minds about whether a low key approach or an aggressive approach is more useful for getting one's own way in the organisation.(6) However, it should be noted that although ambiguity may exist in the

organisation, this is not necessarily perceived by the individuals involved, and it is suggested that the perception of ambiguity is less likely in those organisational settings where the sharing of information is less common. The converse, that the sharing of information necessarily increases perceived ambiguity, is not true because of the development of group norms, as will be discussed in a later section.

(ii) Sources of information - words and deeds. Information about organisational phenomena comes to individual members through a variety of different sources. Most of our information about other people's intentions, perceptions and feelings comes to us through language, and words are notoriously ambiguous symbols in themselves, let alone when used in particular contexts which have a history and a future. Ambiguity of language is not just a grammatical consideration, although that has its effect, but also arises from the idiomatic use of language by individuals and groups. For example, when A wants to get B to do something, the meaning of the words "would you mind... " could be either a command or a request, and the face-value meaning of the statement may be undermined by the usage between the parties concerned. The actual meaning may be unclear to an observer, and the behaviour of the parties subsequently may not throw any light on their political relationship, since the behaviour of B may not indicate whether he or she felt commanded or requested. Nor is it necessarily clear to the parties concerned that the statement is ambiguous, since what A sees as a command, B may see as a request, but neither be aware of this. It could

be said that in this instance a considerable "psychic distance" had developed between the face-value statement and its symbolic significance, i.e. expressive ambiguity, but that the ambiguity created by the differing interpretations is also disjunctive. Two more general suggestions can be made, following from this example: one is that although there may be idiomatic usage of words within an organisation, it should not be assumed that there is agreement about the meaning of those words; the other is that the observable behaviour of individuals is not a sufficient indicator of the political relationship between them, since the disjunctive ambiguity of the political relationship in this instance would not affect the observable (compliant) behaviour.(7) Information about political relationships between people in the organisation may come, not just in the form of discussion, or through the comprehension of idiomatic usage of words, but in the observation of whole incidents, trivial or important, in which the organisation member may be involved directly or indirectly, and which provide verbal and non-verbal clues to the nature of these relationships.(8) A small incident at the beginning of a committee meeting provides an example which shows how ambiguous such incidents can be.

Some committee members having already assembled, a member on coming into the committee room switched on the lights and said: "Is that alright Chairman or are we economising on light?" to which the Chairman made no reply.

Several interpretations could be made of this:

1. The Chairman heard the question but made no reply because:

   a. He was in agreement with the action and thought a reply unnecessary.

   b. He thought it a trivial question not worth replying to.

   c. He did not agree with the action but having been faced with a fait accompli was unable or unwilling to attempt to get it reversed.

   d. He wanted to snub the committee member by paying no attention to him in retaliation for a previous offence.

   e. He thought the remark sarcastic and was refusing to be drawn.

2. The Chairman made no reply because he did not hear the question.

3. The committee member:

   a. Did not really mean it to be a question, but asked it out of courtesy or habit.

   b. Asked the question because he felt he should not take unilateral action, but assumed that the absence of a reply meant consent.

   c. Wished to make a sarcastic comment about the trivial economies which were being advocated.

Interpretations 1 and 2 are disjunctive, while 3 is cumulatively ambiguous with either 1 or 2, and within these there are both cumulative and disjunctive possibilities. 1d and 3a and c are

examples of expressive ambiguity, and any of the ambiguities listed may be projective. It can be suggested that the ambiguities of interactions which are more complex than the example given, are increased by the relative complexity, and that all such incidents, whether trivial or complex, are problematic for organisation members as cources of information on which to base their interpretations of organisational phenomena, whether or not they recognise them as problematic.

The political strategies people adopt in the organisation can have the effect for observers of creating ambiguous information about the meaning of their behaviour. It is suggested by this research that if people adopt more public and vociferous political strategies - joining committees and adopting a "robust" style of interaction - they are more likely to be seen as behaving politically than those who adopt more covert approaches. This finding is supported by Enderud (1976). It can be suggested that the "high profile" approach provides clearer data to an observer who may be more ready, therefore, to attribute meaning to such behaviour than to behaviour which is less easy to define. This is not to say that high profile behaviour is necessarily unambiguous - it just seems so. The strength of the image present by "high profile" behaviour guides the observer's interpretation of it.(9)

(iii) Access to information - Groups and roles. The information process in the organisation is a means by which the abstraction "structure" becomes a reality for organisation members, and the structure in its turn affects the information which individuals

receive. Being part of a group - whether a formally constituted group such as a committee or a department, or an informal coterie - has the dual consequence for the individual of both providing and limiting access to information.(5)

In complex systems where there are a number of decision-making and social groups, some individuals may be members of a number of different groups. However, in the present study, organisation members had some choice over the extent of their multiple group membership. It was possible for people to play three broadly distinct roles: a technical role concerned with their subject specialism; a role as member of a sub-group such as a department or social group; and a role concerned with the organisation as a whole, such as being a member of Senate.(10) It was possible for an individual to choose to confine him or herself almost entirely to a technical role, taking a minimal part in departmental or subject groups and avoiding social groups and system-wide roles. Some roles available to organisation members were particularly useful in providing access to the more powerful groups. Some of these were roles in the technical hierarchy - being a professor for example - others were roles as representatives on such committees as the Board of Studies, for which people could put themselves forward for election. It was also possible to join a group by playing the role of protege to a more powerful organisation member within the same technical specialism, or to become a member of an informal group through such activities as playing snooker.(10)

Information may be acquired by a group through its representation in other groups. In the organisation studied, groups differed in the extent to which they took steps to ensure their representation in the various committees which were part of the formal group structure. The value of this representation to the group as a source of information could be said to depend on the actual attendance of the representative, his or her perceptions of the information available and its usefulness to the group, and the way in which this was fed back to group members.(11)

Having a number of different sources of information through multiple group membership increases the chance of receiving alternative interpretations, that is, the chance of perceiving ambiguity in organisational phenomena. The ambiguity which may thus be illuminated for the individual can be politically advantageous. For example, where people are dependant on a powerful organisation member, as in the patron-protege relationship, having alternative sources of information helps to reduce this dependancy and also to provide an assessment of the political status within the organisation of the person on whom they depend.(12) Membership of different groups also allows for shifts in perspective of which issues are important and to whom. An action may seem of political significance and an actor powerful in one context, but both be relatively insignificant in another.(13)

Shifts in perspective may also reveal or demolish perceptions of consensus over particular issues, so that the same issues can be seen to meet general agreement in one group, but to be highly contentious

in another. For example, in this research, a Decider could perceive, from an Area-level viewpoint, that there was general agreement over a change in policy and general satisfaction with the system of representation in the Area, but at the same time people at School and Group level in particular parts of the Area perceived major conflict over these issues.(14) Changes in perspective may also create ambivalence about organisational policies, so that what seems "right" in the context of one group may seem indefensible in another. Knowing how other individuals and groups variously assess particular issues can be politically useful information. The structuring of the organisation can be a help or hinderance to the individual in receiving this information. Access to information in a group is not just a function of what information accrues to that group, but also of the process of information sharing within the group. Information may be more openly disseminated in some groups than in others, even where such groups have the same formal constitution and are at the same hierarchical level in the organisation. For example, in some Schools in this study, sensitive issues were more openly discussed than in others. This variation is perhaps more likely to occur where there is little task interdependence between groups and so little need to adopt common practices in the information process. In this study it was frequently the case that the outputs of one group were not the inputs of another, in other words, there was little task interdependence, particularly between Schools and Areas, so that there was no great incentive on that basis to adopt common management practices.(15)

It therefore matters which group you belong to, not only because of

the differences in information potentially available to different groups, but also because of differing norms about sharing information. The information provided by multiple group membership may be politically useful, but is also itself subject to political pressures.

It has been suggested by this research that the structuring of the organisation can have the effect of hindering the exchange of information between individuals and groups, and that characteristics of the organisation's climate can reinforce the barriers to information exchange. Competition between individuals and groups is one such characteristic, but it is suggested that competition may not be a generalised aspect of the culture, but only apply to specific issues. It can be said that the less generalised competitiveness is, the less effect it will have in hindering the exchange of information. A norm of secretiveness in the organisation can also have the effect of inhibiting information exchange, and coupled with a distaste for confrontation and a respect for status, can prevent open argument on contentious issues, thus limiting the information on which people can base their interpretations, and hence their decisions.(16)

Given these ways in which people can be provided with or denied access to information, it could be argued that what limits the "decision flows" discussed by Cohen and March (1976) is not just rules, but a more subtle mixture of formal and informal organisational structuring. Information about the roles people are playing within different groups in the organisation can also be ambiguous. The formal system presents certain expectations about the roles that group members will play. For example, in the Senate, members are

expected to discuss academic matters; in the Finance and General Purposes Committee, they will discuss resources. However, whatever the formal requirements, there is no guarantee that members will confine themselves to roles appropriate to the committees they are in. It is perhaps too much to expect that someone who is a member of one group will switch off all knowledge of the interests of another while interacting with that group. One could say that to talk of "solutions looking for problems" (Christensen (1976)) is really to talk about the way individuals carry interests from one group over to another.

Because roles and role boundaries are abstractions based on expectations and values, they provide conditions for role behaviour to be ambiguous. Whether you think a person is acting within their role boundary and conforming to the expectations of a particular situation, depends on where you think the boundary is or should be drawn, and what interpretation you place on the behaviour which comes to your notice, whether at first or second hand. An observer knowing that an individual is a member of other groups may look for signs of inappropriate role behaviour, signs that the interests of other groups are being pursued in the present group. The person playing roles in a number of different groups may experience role conflict, and it is also possible for group members to pursue interests of other groups contrary to the expectations of their present role. The interests of one group may be pursued in the language of another, as for example, a person in the Research Fund Committee who is not expected to "represent" the interests of a particular Area, might

argue the case for a particular allocation of Research Fund in terms of "academic merit" to conceal the fact that Area interests are being pursued.(17)

In these ways the playing of roles in different groups, and the observation that people belong to groups other than the one with which they are at present interacting, help to create ambiguity in their behaviour. The information which people receive from these interactions becomes ambiguous information, particularly in its political reference to who is pursuing what interests. The role behaviour of an individual may be made ambiguous also by the possibility of pursuing private rather than organisational interests. For example, if a person adopts a contentious approach in a decision-making group, this may be interpreted as an attempt to dominate the group for the sake of doing so - a need for power - or as a way of gaining "air-time" for the expression of anger which cannot be expressed elsewhere, or the pursuit of a particular ideology whose roots are outside the organisation. The problems and solutions people carry about with them are not necessarily rooted in organisational issues. Such interpretations have plausibility since people exist other than as occupants of organisational roles, and they throw further doubt on the question of what a person is "really" up to when interacting with others in an organisation.(18)

Notes

1. For discussion of the political implications of information elsewhere in this thesis, see Chapter 3, section 4(b) and Conclusions to that Chapter.

2. This also relates to the issue of "the compliance of B" and to legitimacy as discussed in Chapter 2, section 2 and section 4, and Chapter 3, Conclusions.

3. For reference to the perceived probabilities of the use and effectiveness of negative and positive sanctions, see Chapter 2, section 2, and Chapter 3, Conclusions. Also Chapter 2, section 6 refers.

4. See, for example, Chapter 2, section 3(c) Inference 30.

5. This relates to the political implications of organisation structure. See Chapter 2, section 3, and Chapter 3, Section 2(c).

6. See Chapter 3, section 3(c) Inferences 8 and 17.

7. This has a bearing on the Symbolic interactionist view of political behaviour, since it draws attention to the possibility that a negotiated consensus of meanings may be more apparent than real. See also Chapter 3, section 3(b) Inference 4.

8. Observed during data collection for this research.

9. See Chapter 3, section 2(c) Inference 17.

10. See Chapter 3, section 2(c) Inference 4, and section 3(c) Inference 4.

11. For further discussion of representation, see Chapter 3, section 2(b)1, and section 2(d).

12. See Chapter 3, section 3(c) Inferences 12 and 13.

13. See Chapter 3, section 3(b) Inference 7.

14. See Chapter 3, section 4(e) Inference 15.

15. See Chapter 3, section 4(b) Inference 6.

16. For a discussion of the relevance of values to power in the literature see Chapter 2, section 4. For findings in this research about competition and conflict as aspects of the culture see Chapter 3, section 4(c) and (d).

17. Chapter 3, section 2(b)(ii) provides examples of this ambiguity. See also note 11 above.

18. See Chapter 3, section 3(c) Inference 14.

(c) Bureaucracy and ambiguity. The setting up of formal procedures in an organisation can be seen as an attempt to get rid of ambiguity about how decisions should be arrived at. However, they may fail in this attempt for at least two reasons. One is that they are unable to specify fully what roles should be played at each point in the procedure, so that ambiguity arises over this matter. In the present study, a formal procedure required that person A would submit a project to person B who would pass it to committee C. However, since the role of B was not made explicit, some differences of view arose as to whether B should act as a filter of projects to the committee, or a judge of staff competence on the basis of the project, or an adviser to staff, or simply a post-office.(1) Part of the difficulty of specifying the role to be played by B in such a procedure, even if it were seen as desirable, is the difficulty of getting people to agree to the specification where they have the power to veto it. The picture becomes complicated when one adds the dimensions of time, structure, and the people involved. Where the procedure is an infrequent but recurring event, which links together people who are not normally task-related, and where some role players may be only involved on one occasion, but others recurringly in the same or similar procedures, differences in perceptions about the appropriate roles to be played are likely to occur. In this instance the variation in membership of the procedural chain over time, and the absence of a fully explicit formal procedure, made known to all parties, gave rise to ambiguity. The absence of such explicitness may be the result of a technical difficulty (i.e. you cannot adequately specify the role) or a political one (people will not agree on

specification), or because the potential for ambiguity has not been recognised (one interpretation has been taken for granted as self-evident).

The second way in which formal procedures, even if they are made explicit, can produce ambiguity is through the perceived contrast which can develop between what is supposed to happen and what actually does happen. From the decision-makers' point of view this situation can come about because the culture demands that they justify their actions according to values they find unattainable in practice. Although a decision-making group may be working to formally stated criteria, observers of their decisions may come to the conclusion that these criteria are not really the ones being used.(2) The decision-makers may be able to justify their decisions according to the stated criteria, but the "informal" criteria may also appear to account for their decisions quite plausibly - and perhaps even more plausibly from an observer's point of view. Ambiguity can therefore be said to arise from the steps people take to reconcile conflicts of value, steps which cloud issues for observers so that they can no longer be sure how to interpret events. To give an example, in this study the formally acknowledged value of "academic merit" as a criterion for awarding resources to individuals was to some extent in conflict with the informally acknowledged value of there being "fair shares" between departments and subject groups. The practice of using a formal process which favoured the formal value and an informal process which supported the informal value created disjunctive ambiguity about which value was more important and therefore which criterion was really operating,

and, by implication about whether the decision was legitimate. It could seem too much of a coincidence that "academic merit" just happened to also produce "fair shares" in the allocation of resources, and because of the abstract nature of such values, which creates a difficulty over determining what "merit" is and what is "fair", either interpretation could be justified.(2)

Ambiguity about the activities of decision-makers can have the further effect of shifting the meaning of a formal process. The face-value meaning of a contest of skill, for example, is that the winners will be better than the losers in some specified way. For example, in the present study people competed for Research Funds on the ostensible basis of the "academic merit" of their applications. However, if the procedure by which the winner wins does not appear to involve a credible assessment of skill, the meaning of the outcome may shift from being "better" to being "luckier". In this way a contest of skill can become a game of chance. For example, it was not felt by some people in this study that the Area Committees or the RFC could credibly assess academic merit, and therefore the outcome was a matter of luck, "If your face fits..." and so on.(3) Some of those involved in the process may have a stronger interest in the adoption of one meaning rather than another, but the definition adopted is likely to be strongly influenced by perceptions of the procedure which culminates in the decisive event, that is, in this study, the perception of whether or not the Research Fund decision-making process was credible.

The shift in the meaning of the event can also help to maintain the

perception of the procedure as legitimate, since the behaviour of decision-makers can be seen as appropriate and justifiable in the re-defined circumstances. It could be said that this alteration in meaning represents a shift in psychic distance away from the face-value meaning, and therefore the creation of expressive ambiguity.

The action of an individual involved in a formal procedure may be made ambiguous because the person uses the procedure to symbolise something other than its face-value activity. The overt meaning of applying for a research grant, for example, is that you want to do some research and need funds for the purpose. However, a particular individual might apply for research funds, not through a wish to do any research, but simply to demonstrate an interest in research and so gain credit with powerful organisation members. Such an individual might well feel displeased if "successful" in obtaining funds. By so using a procedure symbolically in pursuit of self-interest, the meaning of the procedure becomes open to more than one interpretation.(4) Christensen (1976) discusses an interesting example of this symbolic use of a decision-making process (expressive ambiguity in my terms) in which much time and energy was used by a group to make decisions which were in the event never implemented, the process having been used for the expression of values and the establishment of status, rather than for the production of substantive outcomes.

The intertwining of informal rules along with bureaucracy in the shape of formal rules can have the effect of creating ambiguity about

the legitimacy of people's actions. Formal rules can have the effect of legitimizing actions because they require those actions, for example, the formula used for allocating the Equipment Funds can be seen as a set of rules requiring a pattern of allocation of resources, and therefore legitimizing that allocation. Alternatively formal rules may legitimize actions because they do not forbid such actions.

If there are few formal rules governing the individual's actions, this provides the opportunity for a great deal of scope in behaviour all of which could be regarded as legitimate. A counterweight to this freedom however is the effect of informal rules, or norms of behaviour, which can limit the behaviour which would be regarded as legitimate. Where there are few formal rules, or where such rules have been undermined, or where there is ambiguity about norms and about the possibility of effective sanctions being applied, the conditions exist for attempts to shift the boundaries of what is legitimate behaviour and for conflict between people over where such boundaries should be drawn.(5)

One could suggest that the Vice Chancellor's Advisory Committee in this study, which was not legally constituted in the university's statutes as the Senate and Boards of Studies were, and which had few formal rules of procedure, and in which there was doubt about the roles of members - i.e. whether they were supposed to represent their Areas - and which was a private meeting, would encourage ambiguity about the legitimacy of actions of VCAC members. The process by which ambiguity can support or undermine the legitimacy

of actions will be returned to in a later section.

Although bureaucracy in the shape of formal rules and procedures can be seen as aimed at reducing ambiguity, it also has the effect of limiting freedom of action more than some people like, and such people may deliberately cause ambiguity in order to loosen the reins of the formal rules. Formal rules may be undermined so that it becomes less easy to determine whether they "really" apply in particular cases, and this can be facilitated by the creation of precedents so that, either by agreement or default, the rules are not applied in some instances. This opens the way for finding other "expectations" and for developing norms which help to create ambiguity. Asked whether a committee could refuse to accept a proposal from another committee, one informant in this research, in replying "I suppose... I don't know if there is a rule book about this - things get done more by custom and practice rather than by the rule book"[6], could be seen as exemplifying the way in which formal procedures can lose their status as obligations, and become reversed by norms of behaviour so that a disjunctive ambiguity is created. The committee in question did have formal powers which would allow it to refuse a recommendation from another committee, but this informant showed how "custom and practice" could work to make such powers inoperative. The political acts in question were (a) the acts of individuals which created and reinforced the norms which undermined the formal powers, including statements that the informal processes are the ones we adopt, and (b) the absence of acts by individuals to reinforce the formal rules, since as Lukes (1974) suggests

non-action can in itself be a type of political behaviour.[7]

The processes undermining formal powers can have the effect of creating ambiguity about what the power of a decision-making group actually is, and this ambiguity may be enhanced if the group is not observed to be enforcing its authority on occasions. There are some good reasons why the authority of a decision-making group is not made explicit if there is the possibility that this would mean confrontation in a public arena. For example, a newly-appointed leader may prefer not to be faced with such confrontations when particularly vulnerable[8] - that is, when the political forces in the organisation are not yet well understood by the leader. Moreover, it may be felt that such confrontations sour relationships between individuals and this may be contrary to the perceived norms of behaviour in the organisation as a whole.[9]

Lobbying committee members in advance of a meeting is one way of avoiding confrontation, so that the committee is never seen to take actions which are contrary to important interests of some groups represented at it. By this means, the power of a decision-making group can become open to various interpretation: (a) the committee is a "rubber stamp" and therefore has little power, (b) the group is powerful simply because it does approve the actions of individuals and groups and therefore might approve something against one's own interest, (c) the lobbying which precedes the meetings of the committee indicates that, (i) it is powerful because people take so much trouble to gain agreement at its meetings and, (ii) it is not powerful because all the decisions are really made outside its meetings.[10]

It can be suggested that bureaucratic structures in the form of formal groups and procedures become organisational phenomena with which the individual interacts. They also become political resources, and individuals, in pursuing their own interests, either in getting their decisions ratified or protecting their authority, or maintaining good relations with others, may create ambiguity through undermining whatever attempts are made to institute bureaucratic certainty in the organisation.

Toshiro (1974) suggests that epistemological developments, in which attempts have been made to restructure human knowledge, can also be seen as attempts to get rid of ambiguity and thereby provide or preserve an ordered view of the universe. However, "... it may be observed that each new way of reasoning generates new ambiguities which in turn provoke the search for more comprehensive theories of casuality". A similar cycle of events can be seen at the level of the organisation, in which the institution of bureaucratic rules and procedures are attempts to structure or re-structure information and to pin down the cause-and-effect of human behaviour, only to provoke political opportunities, for example, in allowing the "improvisation" which Dalton (1959) recommends, or the uneven effects of bureaucracy which allow some people relatively greater freedom of action than others, as Crozier (1964) has noted. (See Chapter 2, section 5 on rules).

Notes

1. See Chapter 3(c). Compare the different methods of "influencing" staff to apply for research awards and the "allow staff to stick their necks out" approach, (see Inference 14).

2. For further information about the problem of ambiguous criteria, see Chapter 3, section 4(b). See also the role of the VCAC, Chapter 3, section 2(b) ii. This point also has a bearing on the difficulty of distinguishing between "reality" and "facade" - see Chapter 3, section 3(d), Section 4(f).

3. Chapter 3, section 4(b) for views on criteria. See also Chapter 3, section 4(c) for the effects of perceptions of criteria on competition.

4. See Chapter 3, sections 3(c) Inference 19, and 4(c) Inference 6.

5. The way in which political opportunity arises over uncertainty about rules is discussed in Chapter 2, section 5 and see also Chapter 3 on criteria (decision rules), note 2 above, and Conclusions to Chapter 3.

6. See, for example, comments about the relationship between Senate and VCAC, Chapter 3, section 2(b) i.

7. This question of non-action relates to the issue of the perceptions and values of participants and their willingness to act politically. See for example, Chapter 3, section 2(b) i, Inference 1. Section 2(b) iii, Inferences 2 and 10, Section 2(b) iv, Inference 3. See also Chapter 2, section 4.

8. See Chapter 3, section 3(a) Inferences 2 and 4.

9. For a discussion of norms about interaction in the field study, see Chapter 3, section 4, especially (d) and (e).

10. See the discussion of the power of the Senate in Chapter 3, section 2(b)i.

Conclusion. I have suggested that a major feature of organisations is their ambiguity and that this ambiguity arises in a number of ways. It is in essence the uncertainty inherent in the information an individual can receive about organisational phenomena, whether this uncertainty is perceived or not. It is created by the use of abstract concepts, by the nature of words and actions which are sources of information and by the structural characteristics of the organisation, such as the formation of groups and playing of roles, which provide access to information. Ambiguity creates a problem of interpretation for the individual, whether this is perceived or not.

It has been suggested in this section that definitions of what exists and what is important have political consequences for the individual or group, and that changing definitions therefore change the power structure of the organisation. Definitions of what power is and values about its use affect political behaviour, and therefore have consequences for oneself and others. A consensus may develop over definitions of phenomena, and may also be subject change.

Two main issues have been identified - the problem of interpretation of information gleaned from the words and actions of others, and the way in which the organisation may provide or deny access to information about meanings, for example, about the power of individuals, and therefore about the existence of ambiguities. Some relevant factors here are the possibility for individuals to play a number of different roles so that it is unclear which they are playing; characteristics of the culture (such as competitiveness)

which help or hinder information sharing; access to groups; and the styles of interaction within different groups, which have an impact on what information can be acquired within a particular group. Information is not just a matter of substantive details, but also concerns the perceptions and feelings of others, and the meaning of their actions.

Bureaucratic procedures, which can be seen as attempts to suppress ambiguity and are part of the individual's context, may have the effect of creating further ambiguity, enabling individuals to use gaps in rules and to shift meanings of events to suit their own interests. Bureaucracy therefore may provide, through creating ambiguity, political opportunity, and this may include the support or undermining of the legitimacy of actions. Ambiguity makes it possible for opportunistic use of rules as Dalton (1959) has suggested, and for rules to be used as "myths" (Bailey (1977)) to legitimize actions.

The suggestions put forward in this section reflect on the existing literature of power reviewed in Chapter 2 in a number of ways. From the perspective of the A-B model of power, the existence of ambiguity in the organisation is important in that it makes it difficult for A and B to interpret each other's perceptions and actions, and therefore difficult for A to know how to influence B, and for B to know how best to respond. It has also been shown in this section that the organisational context influences interpretation, and therefore underlines the importance of including the context of A and B in any analysis of power based on this model. Although

theories about power may be logically constructed on the basis of particular definitions of authority, control and so on, analysis of actual political behaviour depends on the interpretations individual actors make in their context. A symbolic interactionist approach would therefore seem appropriate to the analysis of power in organisations.

The literature of power raises various issues about the relationship between values and power (see Chapter 2, section 4) and it can be suggested that the creation of ambiguity in the organisation is not only one outcome of prevailing values, but also has a part to play in the way in which values are learned and come to prevail since the prevalence of ideas about what "ought to be" may depend on the suppression of ambiguities of interpretation. This process may require a consensus about the meanings of particular words (such as 'useful' in this case) and supports Winch's (1959) implication that the meanings of words have a political significance. However, this still leaves the problems of, on the one hand knowing what the prevailing values are (for example, is it "academic merit" or "fair shares" which prevails?), and on the other of knowing if particular individuals have in fact "learned" them, or found them congruent with their own values, or are merely behaving as if they have, for political reasons. Unless one knows whether or not a person feels coerced, it may be impossible to tell whether authority (in the non-coercive value-congruent definition) is being used or not and this information may be withheld in the pursuit of perceived self-interest.

It has been shown that the interpretation of an ambiguous political context depends on the obtaining of information, and it can be added that values about political behaviour which regard it as tending to corrupt, as discussed in Chapter 2, section 4, may have the effect of reducing the information an individual obtains by inhibiting the collection of politically useful information. By this means, alternative or more complex interpretations of phenomena, (an increase in perceived ambiguity) may be screened out of the individual's awareness. On the other hand, adopting a narrow definition of power may solve the problem of wanting to pursue self-interest, but not liking the idea of exercising power. Suggestions in the literature about the circumstances under which the exercise of power may or may not tend to corrupt, such as whether it is inward-looking or outward-looking, or whether it aligns the organisation with reality, can be seen to be problematic in the light of the ambiguity of organisational phenomena. In the one case the assessment hinges on an interpretation of the meaning of an individual's behaviour, about which, as has been shown, there may be considerable doubt even in relatively simple situations; and in the other case, it involves an interpretation of what "reality" is, which may in itself be politically determined.

In the next section I shall consider the ways in which organisational members respond to organisational phenomena which are ambiguous. I shall assume that organisation members act in accordance with what they see to be their self-interest, whether these interests are predominantly pragmatic or psychological. Pragmatic interests are

relating to specific issues, such as the obtaining of money from the Equipment Fund, whereas psychological interests are more generally pervasive in a person's behaviour, such as the need of power. The need for the individual to impose some structure or pattern on ambiguous data, as suggested by cognitive theorists (Steinbruner (1974)) would also constitute a psychological interest as would a need in the opposite direction. These alternatives will be returned to again in the next section.

4. The response to ambiguity

It has been suggested (Toshiro (1973)) that in their responses to ambiguity over a historical period from the Ancient Greeks to the present day, people can be broadly divided into two camps: the rationalists for whom ambiguity is "an annoyance to the cognitive process" and an aberration in human perception and understanding which should be removed as soon as possible, and artists (including writers and musicians) who positively favour ambiguity since "... saying more than one thing at a time to express the complexity of experience has normally been one of their aims". While these categories distinguish two broadly opposed ways of responding to and acting towards human knowledge, i.e. on the one hand looking for an ordered and comprehensive pattern of cause and effect, and on the other, attempts to express experience in the process of understanding it, they leave out of account the political interaction between individuals and groups as they pursue their self-interest, including the persuasion of others to adopt their way of perceiving the world. In this section therefore, I shall look at ways in which people in an organisation respond to ambiguity, either by trying to remove or maintain it, and at some consequences of these activities. I shall assume that people must take action on the phenomena they perceive, although I recognise that there may be circumstances in which people observe and consider organisational phenomena without being called upon to do anything about them.

(a) Ambiguity in decision-making processes. Decision-making processes can involve considerable areas of ambiguity, as March and Olsen (1976)

have suggested and as the present study shows. One particular example, in this case, was in the criteria being used in decision-making. These criteria gave rise to three questions to which there were no undisputably correct answers: (a) is a particular criterion being applied by the decision-makers? (b) does the decision exemplify this criterion? and (c) (ambivalently) should this criterion be used? For example, are the decision-makers trying to provide fair shares between groups? Is their decision fair? Should they be trying to be fair?[1]

Such ambiguities have implications for the perceived legitimacy of decision-makers' actions, as will be discussed later, but they also require some response from participants in the decision-making process. Two sets of people had to respond to the ambiguities of criteria: the decision-makers themselves and those who were affected by their decisions. It is suggested that where decisions are made on ambiguous criteria, decision-makers can attempt to influence the decision by obtaining agreement to a resolution of the ambiguity in directions which enhance their own interests. Those affected by the decisions, on the other hand, can read such motives and intentions into the decision-makers' choices as are instrumental for themselves. In either case the interpretation may be made to further a pragmatic interest or to meet a psychological need.

Ambiguity about decision criteria can be put to good use by partisans in support of their own cause. If one criterion will not suit their purpose, they may be able to call upon another which will. They may use the formally acknowledged, or informal criteria, or

concentrate on resolving ambiguity of fact or of value in support of their interests.

For example, when the youthfulness of the Applicant and the academic merit of applications are both available as justifications for the ranking of Applicants, they may be seen as mutually exclusive to the extent that older, more experienced staff tend to produce better applications. This enables a Decider to (a) rank a "worse" application higher than a "better" one, on the grounds that the Applicant is younger, or (b) rank the application of the older Applicant higher than that of the younger, on the grounds that the application is better. Choosing (b) may have the advantage of avoiding conflict with senior colleagues and therefore be preferred. In this study, one informant, a Decider, recognised that there was ambiguity about the suitability of his candidates for the Research Fund. He was aware that what he was claiming were "good" candidates could be considered unsuitable if their seniority was taken into account. He would not do anything to draw attention to this ambiguity himself, but was aware that someone else could use it competitively against him. One can suggest that, if the issue of seniority were raised, it would then become a question of whose definition of a "good" candidate could be supported by other members of the decision-making group, and further suggested that whether or not they <u>did</u> support it would depend on how such a definition would affect their own candidates. In other words, the resolution of ambiguity would be a political matter, guided in this case by pragmatic interests.(2)

The effectiveness with which people can make use of the political potential which ambiguity of criteria provides, depends in part on the groups (decision-making arenas) to which they have access. People confined to public arenas, for example, may have difficulty in calling upon informal criteria to their aid, because in such arenas the use of informal criteria might not be regarded as legitimate. In the Senate, for example, it would probably be unwise to refer to a "fair shares" criterion, rather than an "academic merit" criterion.

One important aspect of the political processes in organisations is the making of predictions about what other people will do.(3) Participants in the decision-making process may perceive that there is ambiguity in the basis for those decisions and therefore find outcomes difficult to predict with accuracy. In the present study, the outcomes of the decision-making processes were relatively clear - people either did, or did not, receive Research Funds or Equipment Funds - but the reasons for the decisions about Research Funds were not. Where decision-making processes are recurring, rather than one-off dramas, participants can try to find some common denominators among a series of such decisions over time, in order to try to understand the rationality of those they see as decision-makers, and hence predict their future decisions. They may try to extrapolate from the past a prediction of the future, or indeed, use the past as they interpret it as a precedent in support of a future case. However, when such attempts fail, and the rationality of decision-makers cannot be discovered by participants, confusions and

dissatisfactions may result, with decision-makers being accused of acting on whim or of changing the rules, as happened in this study.[4] One might imagine that where a decision is repeatedly made over time, any ambiguity about it would be resolved, but this appears not to be the case.

Some reasons for the failure of prediction in recurring decision-making processes can be suggested. One is the existence of temporal ambiguity, both retrospective and prospective. What actually happened in the past can be interpreted in more than one way, with equal justification, and it is not possible to determine a "correct" interpretation. You can, of course, ask someone you consider to be well-informed, such as a Decider in this case, but the reply is likely to be conditioned by the informant's perceived self-interest, particularly with an eye to the next round of the decision-making process. Moreover, the kinds of political pressure discussed earlier in this section will not necessarily be repeated in the future. For example, people who lost out in the last round may well make new moves to win next time, or last year's winners may hold back in the next round in order to avoid escalating conflicts which might have an impact on other issues.[5]

A further reason for the failure of predictions may be that an inappropriate model of decision-making is being used by the predictor. People in this study who tended to ignore ambiguity in the decision-making process could be said to be adopting the "rational actor" or "classical" approach to the process (Allison (1971), Steinbruner (1974)) and consequently find themselves in difficulty in making sense of

the outcome. For example, one informant who wanted to maintain the view that the ranking of Research Fund applications was done on academic merit, could not make sense of the ranking which emerged from the Area-level committee, in which applications from another School were placed higher than those from his own School. "I can't quite see why that is". He tried to suggest that an extra criterion of "relevance" (having practical applications) had been applied, but this did not stand up to scrutiny when we looked at the chosen topics. He would not entertain the idea that the other School's applications had been chosen because it was "their turn" - that a "fair allocation" between groups was guiding the decision at this point, rather than academic merit. It can be suggested that this unwillingness to take political pressures into account and to adopt a more complex model of the decision-making process, one which recognised the impact of ambiguity in the process, made the decision outcome inexplicable to him. His resolution of this problem was to retain his previous view, "They must have marked them higher because they thought them of greater merit", which would be unlikely to help him predict future outcomes.(6) One can speculate that this way of resolving ambiguity in a decision-making process, that is, ignoring it, could be related to a preference for seeing himself as involved in a process of academic assessment rather than political bargaining, or in other words, a preference-ordering among values.

A Decider who applied what could be classified as a "cybernetic" model (Steinbruner (1974)) to the process, that is, that small adjustments, based on past experience, would be made to the future

decision-making process to correct anomalies in the system, also failed to make an accurate prediction of the outcome of the process.[4] It can be suggested that this Decider had not taken into account the absence of a consensus in the relevant committee to adopt the cybernetic model - other people having different views of the process in which they were engaged. Failure to take into account the ambiguity inherent in a decision-making process, or to recognise that this (abstract) process itself can be seen in a variety of ways by the different participants, can lead to the making of false assumptions about how the decision will be made, and hence to a failure in prediction.

Underlying the importance of predictions to political behaviour is the importance of time itself as providing both political constraints and opportunities. For example, the time factor can be important in the calculation of bargaining risks of the kind just discussed. If losses can be recouped fairly quickly the risk is less, but when the time-span of redress if bargains are not kept is lengthy - for example, nine years or so before an individual is again Head of School - there is considerable pressure to play safe.[7] Time also has political implications in that it is to some extent structured in the organisation. Some types of decisions, such as the allocation of Research Funds, recurr at given intervals, and some roles are played for given lengths of time. This structuring of time attempts to reduce organisational ambiguity and allows individuals or groups to time their own actions politically, so as to gain the most advantage for themselves. Circulating papers for a meeting very close

to the meeting date, for example, could be seen as a way of inhibiting committee members from forming a lobby, and hence of reducing the strength of opposition.

Weiner (1976) has observed that the effect of deadlines (which can be seen as ambiguity reducing) in a decision-making process is to limit the participation and energy applied to problems, either the problem to which the deadline applies or some other problems from which people have to withdraw in order to meet this deadline. Those who can apply the most time and energy to meeting the deadline become more skilled at dealing with the problem, thus making access by others to the decision-making process more difficult.(8) Weiner's study involved a one-off decision-making process, but one could suggest that where decisions are recurring over time, the "competence multiplier" effect to which he refers, in which involvement in an activity leads to competence in dealing with it, and competence leads to further involvement, works to the advantage of those whose roles require them recurringly to participate in the process, as well as those who choose to participate in it. In the present study, Applicants were relatively free (though under pressure in some cases) to choose participation or not in the Research Fund process, but some Deciders were obliged to participate through their roles as Head of School or Area Chairman. One can suggest that the structuring of time, both in one-off and recurring situations, together with differences in freedom of choice to participate, affect learning opportunities for the individual, and therefore their perceptions of organisational phenomena and their skills in dealing with their ambiguities.

The structuring of time, therefore has political implications both in the political opportinuty and the political skills it provides or denies.

Ambiguity in a decision-making process can be created because the behaviour of decision-makers is, or is perceived to be, a facade. Where an observer resolves the ambiguity of a decision-maker's behaviour by perceiving it as a facade, behind which are the "real" actions and intentions, cynicism about the process is likely to result in a predisposition to see the process as ambiguous on future occasions. For example, it was reported in this research that faith in the fair assessment of Research Fund applications had been shaken by the perception that the Deciders were biassed in favour of their own proteges, this perception being based on an interpretation of past decisions.(9) This distinction between facade and reality may have a sound basis if the public statements of decision-makers diverge from their private actions over a particular issue. Where decision-makers are dealing with ambiguous phenomena, and where there is ambiguity also about the roles they are playing in decision-making arenas, the way is open for them to adopt interpretations of phenomena and covertly play roles while at the same time justifying their decisions and behaviour in terms of other interpretations and roles. For example, because of the difficulty of pinning down what a "good" research project is, within the context of the Research Fund allocations in this study, a decision-maker may choose to interpret "good" as "proposed by someone I know", and to adopt the role of "keeper of the peace" rather than ajudicator. This behaviour is made possible

by the difficulty of defining how a referee ought to act in deciding on the ranking of projects, or of determining how their relative merits are actually being assessed. The overt behaviour of judging relative merit therefore becomes a facade which, because of the ambiguity of the phenomena involved, would not be easy to demolish but might nevertheless be perceived by observers.(10)

Where decision-makers are dealing with ambiguous phenomena, their decisions become open to challenge by those affected by these decisions. One way in which decision-makers may seek to avoid this challenge is to reduce the amount of information they provide about the decision-making process, perhaps backed up by rules which allow them to avoid giving reasons for their decisions, thereby making it legitimate for them to withhold information. An example of this would be the practice of not giving reasons for Research Fund decisions (so as to avoid appeals) backed up by a norm against contact between referees and Applicants. As long as people accept these rules, and the ambiguity for observers which results from the absence of information, decision-makers may be able to obtain the protection they want.(11) However, a consequence of such a response to the difficulties caused by dealing with ambiguity, apart from its effect in increasing the ambiguity about the decision-making process, is that it is difficult for people who are affected by the decisions to find ways of influencing them.(12) There are various ways of looking at the desirability of this outcome. You could argue, as some people did in this study, that it is wrong to adapt your behaviour in order to obtain resources from those who control them. To do so is to

behave falsely and to conform to the ideas of the decision-makers, with whom you may not in fact agree. Knowing as little as possible about the decision-rules is therefore a safeguard against the temptation to falsify oneself.[13] Alternatively, the demands of those who control resources might be seen as representing a high standard. Meeting these demands is therefore a measure of excellence, and an attempt to influence the decision becomes part of the learning process by which a higher standard is achieved. Withholding information about the decision making process therefore diminishes the possibilities for learning, and is a mistaken strategy.[14] A third alternative would be to see the lack of information as a strictly political disadvantage, reducing the possibility of manipulating the situation to one's own ends. A demand for more information therefore has to be made in order to redress the balance of power.

If decision-makers, in dealing with ambiguous phenomena, adopt a strategy of withholding information, power tends to accrue to those who are in a position to obtain information. One way in which this can happen is in the biassing of decisions in favour of those who have information and against those who do not. A particular example of this in the present study concerned information about who was making the decision. If person A knows that X is making the decision, and person B does not (and X knows this), X's decision is more likely to favour A than B, particularly in cultures where conflict is avoided, since A can cause trouble for X whereas B cannot. In general terms, one can say that having the information with which to challenge a decision and thereby undermine the credibility of the decision-maker's reading of the situation, is a political advantage.[15]

In situations where decisions have to be made on the basis of phenomena which are ambiguous in a politically sophisticated context, as when resources have to be shared out in accordance with some value judgement about priorities, and those involved in the process can be expected to have sufficient information to challenge any decision which is made against their interest, one response is to provide a pre-determined formula by which all such allocations will be decided. This is in effect to make a decision about the interpretations to be placed on the ambiguous phenomena, to decide which alternative reading of the priorities will be made, once and for all, so that any future decisions will be more or less automatic. This procedure was used for allocating the Equipment Fund in the present study. The danger is that the formula might especially disadvantage a particular individual or group, and thereby instigate political activity to change it. In at least one instance in the present study, provision was made for some flexibility in the allocation, in that a small proportion of the Fund was allocated by negotiation rather than by formula, and one could say that by adding back a measure of ambiguity it was possible to reduce the likelihood of conflict arising over the main allocation, so allowing for some compensations to be made to people who might otherwise have felt aggrieved. In this instance one could say that preserving a measure of ambiguity in the decision-making process had political advantages.(16)

Notes

1. See Chapter 3, section 4(b).

2. See Chapter 3, section 4(b) and Section 2(b) ii and Inference 6 for that section.

3. See Chapter 2, section 6 and Conclusions to Chapter 3.

4. For problems of, and attempts at, prediction of decision outcomes, see Chapter 3, section 2(b) ii.

5. The informal adjustments to decision-making to allow for "fair" allocation of resources mentioned in Chapter 3, section 2(b) iii suggest this process. See also Inference 7 for that sub-section.

6. This discussion was also referred to in Chapter 3, section 2(b) ii.

7. For discussion of the effects of rotating leadership roles, see Chapter 3, section 3(c) and Inference 1.

8. This discussion of the political implications of the structuring of time refers back to the discussion of the timing of influence attempts in the Conclusions to Chapter 3 and to Chapter 2, section 3.

9. For examples of ambiguity of behaviour in this research, see Chapter 3, section 3(c) and see also Inferences 26 and 27 for that section.

10. Dilemmas and ambiguities in making judgements about other people's work are discussed in Chapter 3, section 3(c) and Inferences 26-29 for that section.

11. See Chapter 3, section 4(b) and Inference 1 for that section. Also Conclusions to that Chapter on the use of information as political opportunity.

12. Chapter 3, section 4(b) Inference 3.

13. Because of changing values in the organisation i.e. towards research rather than teaching, with a concomitant emphasis on "usefulness", and a shortage of resources, some organisation members seemed faced with a moral dilemma about their activities or the reasons for them. Do people do research for career reasons or for interest? If I "embellish" my application for Funds does it become "false"? See Chapter 3, section 3(c) Inference 30, and section 4(a) and Inferences 1 and 5 for that section, and (c) Inference 2.

14. See comments about the need for feedback on Research Fund decisions - section 4(b).

15. See comments about the role of Deciders in assessing others' work, Chapter 3, section 3(c) and Inference 27 for that section.

16. See Chapter 3, section 4(d).

(b) Interpretation and specialisation. In this section I shall consider the problem of ambiguity as it affects the interpretation of behaviour, with particular reference to specialist roles in the organisation.

Where there is ambiguity there is always the possibility of divergence or congruence between the actor's intentions and the observer's perceptions of these intentions. The chart below suggests the types of relationship which can develop between actor and observer as a result:

Figure 6

		Actor's Intention	
		Truth	Falsehood
Observer's Perception	Truth	Trust	Con
	Falsehood	Frame	Game

In the relationship of mutual trust the actor intends to present reality and the observer perceives that this is the case (without necessarily agreeing with the picture of reality presented). This relationship requires the willingness to acknowledge perceived organisational ambiguities. In the "con" relationship, the actor intends to mislead the observer by presenting a facade, or false picture of reality as he or she perceives it, and is successful in that the observer takes this to be a truthful representation.

The "con" may depend on the suppression of disjunctive ambiguity. For example, one Head of Group may agree with another that his group will contribute to the maintenance costs of a new piece of equipment, knowing that he intends to renege on his agreement once the equipment has been purchased. Or, the "con" may depend on the suppression of cumulative ambiguity, in that a piece of information (external to the actor) which could radically alter the observer's decision is withheld. For example, the Head of Group mentioned above could agree to contribute to the maintenance costs, but suppress the information that such difficulty will arise over trying to apportion these costs fairly, that the agreement will be difficult to implement. For the "con" to work, all such alternative interpretations of phenomena (in this case, future events) must remain unperceived, or be rejected by, the observer.(1)

In a "game" relationship, the actor intends and the observer perceives (whether or not the actor is aware of it) that a facade is being presented, and both parties continue to behave as if it were truthful. In this relationship it is necessary for both parties to recognise the ambiguity (of whatever kind) of the actor's behaviour, but to retain the facade that the ambiguity does not exist.

The relationship takes on the nature of "framing" the actor if he or she intends to present reality, but the observer perceives falsehood.(2) In this case a disjunctive ambiguity is created. The misperception by the observer need not be due to any ill-intent on the observer's part, since false information may have been provided

(deliberately or otherwise) by third parties. Actors may in fact "frame" themselves by "conning" others or playing "games" on occasions, so that their actions are always likely to be viewed with suspicion. It can also be suggested that observers who themselves adopt "conning" and "game" behaviour are more likely to perceive such behaviour in others, thereby creating projective ambiguity.

It should perhaps be restated here that it is of the essence of ambiguity that it is not possible to be sure which of the alternative interpretations of phenomena is the correct one, either because the phenomena are inherently ambiguous, or because political forces prevent its being resolved. Both these conditions exist in the relationships just discussed, and the problem compounded by the difficulty people may sometimes have in being clear about their own intentions, so that they could not explain them even if they wanted to.

One situation in which an organisation member may be vaguely aware that a "con" is possible, but be unable to determine whether this is the case, is when faced with an interpretation of phenomena provided by an "expert". People may feel compelled, through constraints of information and skill, to accept at face value interpretations of phenomena which they are aware might be interpreted differently, but cannot themselves supply alternative readings, and a "game" or "frame" relationship may develop. In the present study, for example, one Decider was seen as being the only person with a detailed overview of the organisation's financial position, and this could make

other organisation members feel unable to challenge his interpretation of what the priorities should be, or of how much money was available in a particular fund.[3]

Even if the observer has some ideas about alternative readings,he or she may still not challenge the specialist, and two reasons can be suggested for this: (a) the facade helps to further the pragmatic interests of the observer, and (b) the observer feels unable or unwilling to pay the costs of challenging the interpretation - for example, in the disruption of amicable relationships, or the deflection of time and energy from other activities, or in being faced with more difficult decisions through the greater complexity which ambiguity might bring with it. The issue may not be seen as important enough to warrant paying these costs.[4]

Alternatively, the observer may seek to acquire sufficient knowledge and skill to challenge the expert, and the expert seek in return to avoid this challenge. On the one hand there is an attempt to draw attention to the ambiguity in the phenomena being interpreted, by showing that alternatives are possible, on the other the attempt to suppress it. The contest turns on the control of information about the phenomena, including the range of coherent information which the obeerver has about a particular issue (as in having a broad picture of the organisation's finances, rather than information only about one School or Area), the ways in which data can be manipulated (as in the technicalities of financial management) and what alternative meanings are possible (as in the question of what can be counted as "capital" expenditure).[5]

When decision-making about substantive issues in the organisation has to rely on specialist information, as is often the case, ambiguities about the intentions of specialists as well as about the substantive issues, have to be resolved. To take example from this study, is the specialist trying to increase his power by taking decisions to which he is not entitled? Or is he just not a good communicator and therefore misunderstood?(5) The reputation of the specialist can be seen as consisting not only of perceived technical efficiency over time, but also of a perceived pattern of intention over time. Specialists in an organisation may be seen as powerful because they are perceived as having the opportunity to "con" others with impunity, even if they do not avail themselves of this opportunity. The closer their specialisation is to issues considered important to the observers, the more critical is the interpretation of their behaviour and the more power they are perceived to have.

Specialist status can become valued in the organisation because of the power it can confer, and examples were found in the present study of attempts by people to claim specialist status for themselves and to deny it to others. Examples of this would be the administrator who said that professors were "simple minded" and therefore did not understand the finances of the organisation, and the academic who said that the administrators did not understand the scientific requirements of siting and building a new aquarium, and should therefore leave the decision to those who did.(6)

It can be suggested that the acquisition and maintenance of specialist status can be accomplished by the manipulation of ambiguity, undermining others' interpretations of organisational phenomena by increasing their ambiguity, and protecting one's own view by suppressing ambiguity-producing alternatives. Crucial to this process is the control of information.

Notes

1. See Chapter 3, section 2(c) and Inference 3(d).

2. See allegations of "trickery" in Chapter 3, section 3(c).

3. See Chapter 3, section 3(b) Inferences 2, 6 and 8. See also the discussion on the difficulty of interpreting another's behaviour in the Conclusions to Chapter 3.

4. This relates to the issue of commitment and motivation discussed in Chapter 2, section 2 and Chapter 3, sections 3(d) and 4(f) and Conclusions.

5. See Chapter 3, section 3(b).

6. This is related to the question of who should be involved in decision-making - See Chapter 3, section 4(e) Inference 7 and 8 - and the question of autonomy for self vs autonomy for others - see Chapter 3, Conclusions, and Chapter 2, section 4.

(c) Resolution by group norms. Mowday (1978) has suggested that one line of development from his research would be an investigation of how characteristics of the overall organisation, such as norms (and also structure and climate), affect the success of various methods of influence. This question can be broadened to ask what part norms play in the political processes of organisations, since it is suggested by this research that norms can be used by individuals to further their own interests.(1) In this way, norms can be seen as providing political opportunities, as well as constraints. It is also suggested that, through the development of norms, ambiguity is suppressed, and that this process has political causes and consequences, as will be discussed in this section.

Although group members may be unaware of doing so, groups may adopt norms of behaviour which resolve ambiguities in organisational phenomena by "deciding" on a particular interpretation. Norms can be seen in this sense as a "meaning in usage" in a group which governs the actions of group members. So, for example, a stranger approaching the group may be taken to be an unwelcome intruder, since the group has "decided" that what is inherently ambiguous behaviour will be taken to "mean" a threat.(2) In this instance one could say that an expressive ambiguity has been adopted as a norm, and through its impact on relationships between individuals and groups, could have political consequences. For example, in the situation just cited, conflicts of interest would be more difficult to solve between groups predisposed to see each other as threatening strangers.

Group norms may also work towards the suppression of ambiguity in decision-making processes where the desirability of alternative outcomes is being assessed. In the present study, it was suggested that research projects about improving the railways of Pakistan would be preferred to projects investigating colour images in Kafka, because the former could be identified as "useful". The word "useful" in the organisation seemed to be equated with economic gains, or at any rate, some measurable pay-off, but if the cumulative ambiguities of the concept of usefulness had been acknowledged - by asking such questions as "useful to whom and for what purpose?" - it would have been more difficult to apply as a criterion for descriminating between projects. The further away from measurement the criterion became, the more difficult it would be to assess the relative pay-off of different projects, or indeed to say whether there was any pay-off at all.(3) It can be suggested that where the outcome of an activity is ambiguous in that it cannot be clearly defined or its existence demonstrated, the activity is likely to be denigrated in favour of an outcome which is more measurable and certain. This is because ambiguity tends to make the norms of rationality by which people try to run organisations more difficult to apply, since it works against calculation, measurement and prediction. The suppression of ambiguity can therefore help people to make decisions, since it reduces the possible interpretations of the phenomena which must be dealt with. The interpretations which are acknowledged can then become crystallised into the formal organisation process - its structures and procedures. In the organisation studied, for example,

teaching across group boundaries was formally provided for and had a certain outcome (the courses could be taught) whereas the exchange of ideas across group boundaries, which had no certain outcome had no place in the formal system. The formal system may also become protected by group norms and by individuals' interests in protecting the status quo. In this example, a group's acceptance of the equation "useful=measurable" would support a structure designed to facilitate measurable or certain outcomes, and individuals interested in improving the railways of Pakistan would also have an interest in maintaining the supremacy of this equation.

Once norms are established which suppress some interpretations of organisational phenomena - i.e. suppress ambiguity - such norms can be used in the influence process in the organisation. So a Head of School may say "my staff think..." knowing that this will be taken as an authoritative statement in support of some case, in spite of the inherent difficulty of knowing what other people think. Where norms are strong, those whose behaviour does not conform may find that they have provided ammunition for opponents to undermine their position. When a norm has been established, an organisation member who recognises the ambiguity which the norm papers over has three choices: (a) to ignore the ambiguity and conform to group norms, or (b) to acknowledge the ambiguity and confront group norms, or (c) to put up a facade of conformity while pursuing a non-conforming action. Either course of action may facilitate a pragmatic or personal interest, but (b) and (c) are unlikely to be effective without power. In the present case, examples were found of people who could flout group norms either because they were

relatively independent of the group, or because the group was dependent on them for a resource which the group had decided to norminate as important. So, someone who "didn't need the job" in the organisation could avoid carrying out administrative duties expected by the group, and another person who brought contracts into the organisation to its financial benefit could adopt a contentious style of behaviour against norms of low-key interaction.(4) To follow course (c) also requires power in the sense of having the personal skill to carry it out.

Notes

1. See Chapter 2, section 4 for a discussion of the relationship between values and power, and Chapter 3, section 4 for evidence of this relationship in the field study.

2. See Chapter 3, section 2(c) on the relationships between groups in the SCR, also Inference 2(b) in that section.

3. See Chapter 3, section 4(a).

4. See Decider's self-perceptions of power, Chapter 3, section 3(c) and Inference 9.

(d) Legitimacy and ambiguity. In this section I shall consider one of the effects of organisational ambiguity, which is that it poses questions about the legitimacy of the actions of organisation members, and provides opportunities for changing the basis of legitimacy.

As Schaar (1970) has pointed out, legitimacy is conferred either by endorsement of the action by an authority above and beyond the actor, or by reference to the values of group members. Legitimacy, or the right to take the action one takes, can therefore be seen as only being granted within the framework of role expectations, and is only secure if it conforms to the expectations of the more powerful members of the organisation or the relevant external individual or group.(1) In the present study, the professoriat could be seen as the main determiners within the organisation of what is legitimate action, and the University Grants Committee would be an example of a powerful external group who could determine, in respect of some issues, what would be legitimate action. Legitimacy can be said to be based on the ability to justify one's action to the relevant audience - relevant in that it has the capacity to undermine one's authority to act. What is considered to be a justification depends on the prevailing values of that audience, which find expression in the formal or informal rules, (including in some instances the laws) which apply in the organisation.

In order to assess whether an action is legitimate, the actor must interpret the informal or formal rules, and the audience must

interpret the actor's behaviour, and this is where ambiguity comes into the picture. There may be a doubt about whether the rules really apply,[2] as discussed in a previous section (3(c)) and about how the action might be interpreted or what role is being played[3] (see sections 3(b) and 4(b)). Moreover it is possible for formal and informal rules all to be relevant to an issue but to conflict with each other as far as justification is concerned. For example, if powerful organisation members hold values which are anti-bureaucratic, an appeal to the rules, even if they formally exist and can be shown to apply to a particular case, might be considered a weak argument which would not justify, and therefore not legitimise, an action. In making a decision about how to act, and whether one's action would be considered legitimate, one may therefore be faced with ambiguous criteria on which to decide. It can be suggested that illegitimate action may arise through a failure to perceive this ambiguity, or a misjudgement of the relative power of support for alternative interpretations within a powerful relevant audience. It can also be noted that, through their role as legitimizers, rules may not so much constrain action as provide justification for it. You may be able to decide what you want to do, then "find institutional sanction for what you are doing". It may become a question of being able to persuade people that your action is legitimate, by persuading them to interpret your action or the rules in particular ways.[4]

One reason why ambiguity arises about the legitimacy of the actions of organisation members is that, just because certain values prevail

in the organisation it does not mean that the alternatives necessarily disappear from the consciousness of organisation members (although this might happen). It is therefore possible for a person to consider that, although an action is legitimate on the grounds that it can be justified by prevailing formal or informal rules relevant to the issue, it is not legitimized by the individual's own values. What is regarded in the organisation as legitimate is a relative, not an absolute attribute, depending on who has the most power and whose values therefore prevail, but subject to political pressure for change.(5)

It matters, therefore, who thinks a particular action is legitimate or not. It may be possible for an organisation member to get away with taking action which some other members consider illegitimate. For example, the professor who refused to discuss financial matters with the staff in his School was not seen as behaving legitimately by the staff - his behaviour did not conform to their expectations or their values about how he should treat them - but they also felt powerless to change his behaviour.(6) Whether or not such perceptions of illegitimacy pose any real threat to the actor, depends on whether people are able, or willing, to mobilise enough political resources to compel a change in behaviour, and also on the extent to which the behaviour is supported by the more powerful people in the organisation. Norms which resolve ambiguities of interpretation by deciding that the Head of School's view is what counts in preference to views of the staff, would clearly support the behaviour of the professor in this case.(7) It can be suggested that the power structure in the

organisation may support one interpretation of legitimacy - an essentially ambiguous phenomenon - in preference to another, but where the basis of this legitimacy conflicts with the values of some organisation members, the potential for change in this basis is present.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that actors are continually under pressure to justify their actions in order to maintain their legitimacy, in relation to all issues. As Dearlove(1973) found in his study of local authority decision-making, and as some of the data in the present study suggest, authority may "rest on a bed of apathy and acquiescence"[8], (p.89). One of the effects of apathy can be that ambiguity is suppressed, making it easier for actors to persuade others that their actions are legitimate. Actors may retain considerable freedom of action by avoiding challenge to their justifications, and hence to their legitimacy of action, and are helped in this by characteristics of the organisation which make the exchange of information difficult, such as competitiveness and other barriers to social interaction. It has been suggested that interaction between organisation members is a means by which alternative interpretations of phenomena, and hence ambiguity are brought to light, and it is also a process which promotes the development of group pressure and the mobilisation of political resources. Aspects of the organisation, and perceptions of individuals of their self-interest, which operate against these processes of political mobilisation and exchange of information assist actors to remain free of challenge.

One problem which actors may face in maintaining the legitimacy of their actions, however, arises through the existence of retrospective ambiguity. Because legitimacy is based on informal as well as formal rules, and these are subject to change, there is the possibility that an action may trigger off a decision about its legitimacy after the action has taken place, so that what appeared to be legitimate - for example, because there appeared to be no formal rule forbidding it - may be determined as illegitimate by retrospective decision. One could suggest that one of the functions of lobbying powerful organisation members - the relevant powerful audience - in advance of an action, is to avoid retrospective challenge to legitimacy. However, lobbying (which can be seen as an attempt to remove prospective ambiguity), has the political disadvantage that it may draw attention to the proposed action and thereby invite opposition, which otherwise might have been avoided. When people are accused on the one hand of taking decisions to which they are not entitled, and on the other of not communicating sufficiently with others, this may indicate that they are caught in this dilemma of avoiding prospective opposition or retrospective challenge to legitimacy.(9)

It can be suggested that what is regarded in the organisation as legitimate and justifiable depends on whose values prevail, that is, who has the most power, whether individuals or groups. But power structures can also be changed by a change in the consensus of values, andhence, so also can the basis of legitimacy be changed. In the present study this process could be seen in relation to the issue

about whether academics should do research, or whether it was legitimate for them to give priority to teaching or administration. The change in role expectations for academic staff was being given effect by changes in the power structure (such as the appointment of a new Vice Chancellor and new professors)[10]. However, there was still some ambiguity about the academic role. Some people talked about the "contractual obligations" on staff to do research, but others denied that such obligations existed, and there were similar ambiguities about whether research counted in passing probation.[11] It was the stated intention of the more powerful organisation members that the university should become more research oriented, and this shift in values could be seen as undermining the legitimacy of some people's behaviour, but supporting the behaviour of others. It became legitimate to spend time and money on research activities as a priority, and some people who did no research found themselves being challenged. For example, for one member of staff it was becoming no longer legitimate to spend more than his allocated time on the lighting studio for architectural students, although in the past this had been regarded as justifiable and worthy.[12] Ambiguities about role expectations can give rise to conflicts about legitimacy, as perceptions and interpretations change over time. It can be suggested that since legitimacy is the basis of authority, when legitimacy is supported or undermined, so is authority, and that this has consequences for the scope of future actions. The following diagram illustrates the process by which the basis of legitimacy and authority can be changed.

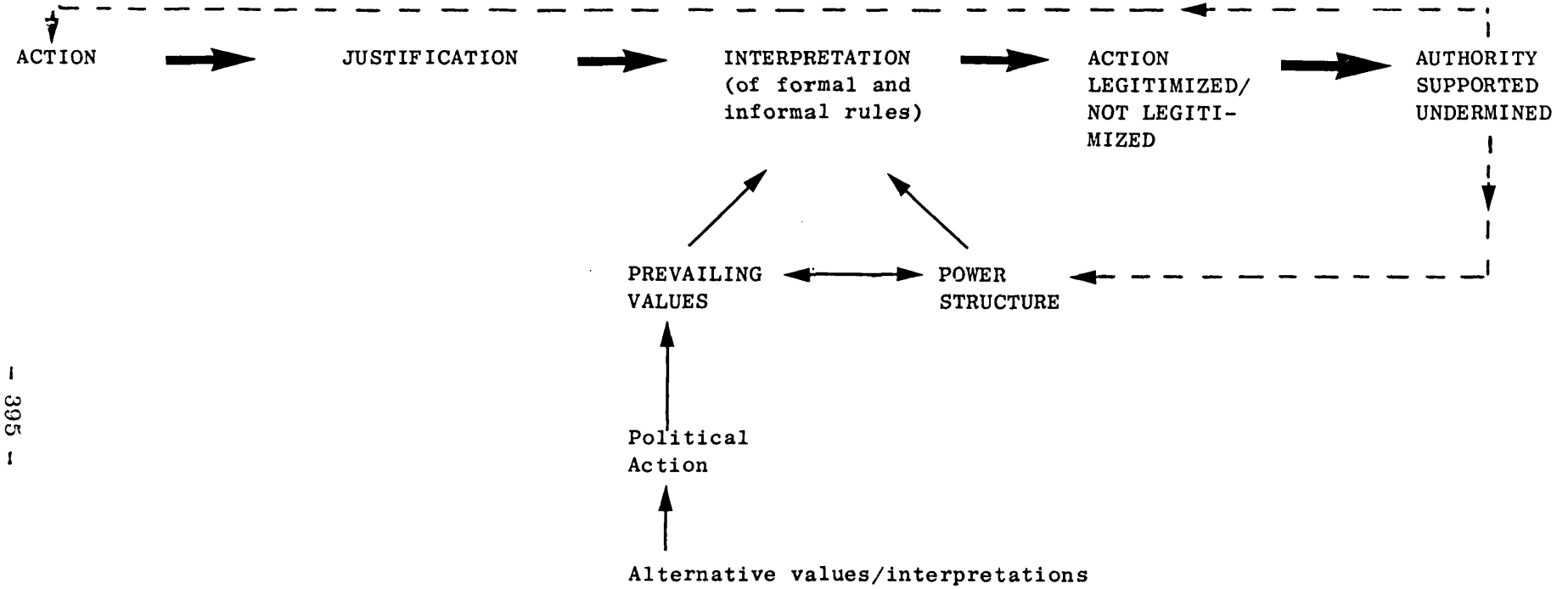

ACTION
JUSTIFICATION
INTERPRETATION (of formal and informal rules)
ACTION LEGITIMIZED/ NOT LEGITI-MIZED
AUTHORITY SUPPORTED UNDERMINED
PREVAILING VALUES
POWER STRUCTURE
Political Action
Alternative values/interpretations

Figure 7

Notes

1. See Chapter 2, section 4 for a discussion of legitimacy in the literature.

2. See Chapter 2, section 5 and Chapter 3, section 4(b) on uncertainty about decisions rules and Conclusions to Chapter 3.

3. See Chapter 3, section 3(b) Inferences 2, 6 and 8. See also the discussion on the difficulty of interpreting another's behaviour in the Conclusions to Chapter 3. See also Chapter 3, section 2(b) ii for ambiguity about roles being played.

4. See Chapter 3, section 4(e) Inferences 10, 11 and 12.

5. The various shades of opinion about the relative importance of teaching and research provide an example of a conflict of values which could undermine legitimacy - see Chapter 3, section 4(a).

6. See the discussion of Heads of Schools, Chapter 3, section 3(c).

7. See the discussion of the views of Zed in Chapter 3, section 4(e).

8. For signs of apathy, see Chapter 3, section 2(b) iii, Inference 10, section 2(b) iv, and section 4(e). This also relates to the question of motivation, see Chapter 2, section 2 and Chapter 3 section 3(d), 4(f) and Conclusions.

9. See Chapter 3, section 3(b).

10. See Chapter 3, section 3(c) Inference 15.

11. See the discussion of pressures on staff to do research, Chapter 3, section 3(c).

12. This relates to the view that "when you start research in the department, the undergraduates suffer" - Chapter 3, section 4(a).

(e) Testing reality. If organisational phenomena are not "all in the mind" but really exist in the individual's environment, this raises the question of how, and to what extent the individual can determine what is really "out there" and distinguish it from projected ambiguity. It could be suggested that the only way to test reality is for organisation members to take action in accordance with their perceptions, and then see to what extent the consequences confirm or deny their perceptions. Apart from the difficulty of specifying what an "action" is, particularly when abstract phenomena are involved in it, there are a number of problems in the notion of testing reality through action, and some of these will be discussed in this section.

Since ambiguous phenomena have to be interpreted, the interpretation put on them by the perceiver can be said to reflect his or her preferred ways of thinking. There was evidence in this research that ways of thinking about the organisation can be influenced by people's specialist interests, in that metaphors of equations, mechanical devices and chemical processes were used in interpreting organisational phenomena.(1) As far as organisational politics is concerned, thinking styles can also predispose people to look for sequential rather than reciprocal cause and effect, so that they expect to be able to say that A influences B and therefore B acts, in explanation of organisational events. The "cognitive annoyance" which Toshiro (1973) mentions as a response to ambiguity, may be due to a poor fit between such metaphors and models and the phenomena with which the person is confronted in the organisation.

The use of particular modes of thought can be seen, not as a neutral activity, but as subject to their perceived instrumentality for the perceiver, and therefore of political significance. Gombrich (1963) in writing about the individual's responses to ambiguous visual images, has pointed out that once one interpretative decision has been taken - for example, which is "figure" and which is "ground" - other interpretations logically follow from this to provide an image which can be understood. It is suggested by this research that people's interpretations of organisational phenomena can also be seen as having a degree of consistency, so that a cluster of certain kinds of interpretations, leads to a relatively coherent, and therefore understandable picture. An example of this can be found in the discussion of the data collected from Zed (see Chapter 3 pp 136 ff). Zed can be seen as having interpreted the organisation as characterised by single-minded purpose and a high degree of order and consensus, that is, a low level of ambiguity, with just a few minor aberrations which could be disregarded. This view was consistent with a preference for centralisation of decision-making. It can further be suggested that it suited Zed's interests,whether pragmatic or psychological, to see it this way, since it allowed him to justify the exercise of covert, behind-the-scenes power, by influencing the few powerful people in a centralised system, people to whom his own role in the structure gave him access. Seeing the organisation this way not only made it understandable to Zed, but also was politically useful. The way in which individuals deal with ambiguity may also be seen as a defensive strategy. For example, in the relationship where one party is considerably dependent on the other, as in the patron-protege relationship, where the patron has clearly identifiable

sources of power, such as the ability to offer a job, secure a promotion or provide resources, there may be considerable incentive for the protege to interpret events or situations in ways which show the patron in a favourable light. Alternative readings may be suppressed in order to maintain the commitment to the powerful person. So a staff member may castigate all powerful organisation members as incompetent managers but ignore the possibility that his own professor is also one of them. He can therefore avoid seeing himself as having chosen dependence on a incompetent person.(2) These examples suggest that what is taken to be "reality" therefore can be seen as subject to the ways of thinking of the individual and his or her perceived pragmatic and psychological interests. These factors can be said to apply, not only when decisions are being made about what action should be taken, but also in assessing the outcome of that action and whether or not the outcome supports or disconfirms the actor's perceptions of reality.

It is also suggested that the time dimension of such interpretations must be taken into account, in that recurrences and patterns in phenomena are perceived by individuals over time. Looking back, the past can be used to support one's present interests, for example, by claiming that precedents have been set in the past, or by reference to tradition, or to long-term policy decided at earlier times. Although organisational history may be in written form - memos, minutes and other documents - these can be ambiguously worded when looked at in the present some years later, and indeed, it may have been the intention at the time of writing, for reasons

which were important to someone then, that the wording should not be too clear. But even if the intention was that the statement should be clear, there is no guarantee that it will remain so with the passage of time. The oral tradition of the organisation is even more vulnerable to changes in interpretation, so that informal contracts, for example, may change over time to the detriment of one of the parties.(3) Ambiguities created by the passage of time provide scope for individuals to interpret the past in ways which suit their present interests. Newcomers to the organisation are put at a disadvantage by this process since they have to rely on interpretations made by others, while themselves lacking this historical resource.(4)

It has been suggested that, looking back into the past at the decisions that have been made, people try to see patterns which would illuminate the rationality of the decision-makers and therefore make prediction possible, but that such predictions may fail because of political pressures on decision-makers, including their own reinterpretations of the past.(5) It can be added that looking back into the past can reveal what looks like a pattern of intentions by particular individuals, a long-term political strategy for which every move is carefully calculated and which unfolds with time to a point where a pattern begins to emerge. However, the meaning of this pattern may remain ambiguous in that it may not be clear whether such individuals really are following a long-term strategy, or simply turning opportunities as they arise to their own advantage, such actions appearing to be a deliberate strategy

because of the actors' preferences for seeing their self-interest in particular ways. The resolution of this ambiguity is made more difficult because people are not always clear about their own motives at the time of action and could not necessarily explain their intentions even if they were willing to do so. While time may give coherence of intention to the behaviour of B as perceived by A, the picture, though coherent, is not necessarily "real".

Looking forward in time, people pursuing their self-interests may try to predict the future - how others will act or react to them. Such predictions guide present decisions, and in decision-making groups, whichever prediction prevails will affect the political position of individuals affected by the decision. For example, if the prevailing prediction is that the UGC will demand that the teaching of particular subjects be cut back, individuals in those subject areas will be politically disadvantaged and will remain so until the prediction proves false. In this instance it can be suggested that an attempt to determine reality by resolving prospective ambiguity has created a shift in the power structure; the search for one reality has created another one to the detriment of some individuals or groups, even before the outcome of the prediction is known. In addition, it can be said that some outcomes are themselves ambiguous so that the accuracy of the prediction may be politically, rather than factually determined.

The accuracy of interpretations of organisational phenomena, whether these arise from individual or group decisions about meanings, may come to be tested, perhaps unintentionally, by newcomers to the

organisation. Organisation members with this threshold status are at a disadvantage politically in that they have difficulty in distinguishing how others are interpreting organisational phenomena (including reactions to their own behaviour) and what uses are being made of organisational ambiguities, or might be made by themselves. However, they have the advantage of not yet being socialised into particular ways of thinking about or interpreting the organisation, and consequently may call into question the existence or interpretation of phenomena which have been taken for granted by others, or even demonstrate that some phenomena - particular constraints for example - do not really exist.(6)

One reason why people maintain their interpretations of organisational phenomena, even where these disregard ambiguity, is that such interpretations work - that is, they appear to meet the individual's need to make sense of the organisation and from a political point of view they lead to favourable results. The extent to which interpretations of phenomena are influenced by characteristics of the organisation, and of the individual, are not normally apparent to the organisation member, and since the interpretations work, they can be taken as synonymous with reality. It can be suggested that people do not deliberately test out the reality of their interpretations unless they become conscious of a need to do so, and an example of this was found in the present study over the perception by some organisation members that they had a high degree of autonomy. Where people have a sense of having a good deal of freedom of action arising from a congruence between what more powerful organisation

members want them to do and what they themselves want to do, the limits of their autonomy may be unclear. Since they have never attempted to diverge from their role requirements, by, for example, refusing to carry out a task, they do not know whether they could refuse if they wanted, or what would be the consequence. The notion of autonomy within the organisation may be ambiguous in this way, in that although it appears to exist its reality cannot be tested or its limits determined until some point of conflict is reached. It could be said that in such circumstances phenomena are being taken for granted by organisation members, but may have only a nebulous existence.(7)

Because of the effects of seeing what we want to see, of the availability of only part of the information and the variable ability to deal with it, and potential for distortion over time, testing reality by making predictions of future events and then looking back to see if they proved correct is not an infallible test. Whatever time tells, it is not necessarily the truth. Looking forward and backward in time, certain issues may stand out as landmarks, major opportunities, threats and challenges which focus the attention and encourage people to clarify their own and others' intentions and interests, but perhaps for this very reason much of the landscape slips by in a blur of half-recognition, but some of that may turn out later to have been significant.(8)

Temporal ambiguity also enables others to challenge the legitimacy of the individual's actions, since legitimacy may be affected by shifts in interpretation or in values. Information can be used to

undermine or support particular interpretations, and specialisation can facilitate this process. A consensus about interpretation may develop as a result of normative pressure in groups. Although reality may be illuminated by the arrival of newcomers to the organisation, the testing of reality is problematic because of the operation of temporal ambiguity, the influence of ego defences, and the use of particular cognitive models.

In the next section, the main issues covered in this chapter will be summarised, showing how both the creation of and response to ambiguity is related to political behaviour in organisations.

Notes

1. For examples see Chapter 3, section 2(b) ii, and Inference 10, Section 4(e) the discussion of the views of Zed, and "money in, paper out" Section 4(a). See also Chapter 2, section 2(b) i, Inference 3.

2. See Chapter 3, section 3(c) Inferences 12 and 13.

3. See Chapter 3, section 2(c) Inference 3(d).

4. See Chapter 3, section 3(a) Inference 4, and 3(c) Inference 16.

5. For the problems of prediction and pressures on Deciders making judgement of others' work, see Chapter 3, section 3(c) Inferences 26-29.

6. See Chapter 3, section 3(c) Inference 16.

7. See Chapter 3, section 4(e) Inference 9.

8. This lends weight to the problem discussed in Chapter 2, section 2, which arises if an attempt is made to confine the concept of power to "significant" events, since ambiguity about significance may be retrospective, and hence power also.

(f) Conclusion. It has been suggested in this section that individuals respond to organisational phenomena which are either intrinsically or for political reasons ambiguous. Ambiguous phenomena present individuals with political opportunities in that they leave the way open for interpretations which favour the individual's cause, whether psychological or pragmatic. They also, however, provide problems in that the interpretation of the intentions and behaviour of others, and prediction of outcomes, becomes difficult.

In interactions between individuals, ambiguity provides a range of possibilities between truth and falsehood, intended by the actor and perceived by the observer. The existence of ambiguity provides the opportunity for the actor to dissemble, and this action in turn creates more ambiguity. Ambiguity provides problems of interpretation for the observer, and the interpretation decided upon may itself be projective and therefore create further ambiguity.

People may respond to ambiguity and the difficulties it causes them, either in interpretation or in terms of other people's responses to it, by suppressing information. This may have the effect of creating further ambiguity, and also may provide political opportunity in that some people may be able to obtain information which is withheld from others and which may be politically useful. Expertise is a special case in which ambiguity is created because information is not, by definition, readily accessible to others and they are likely to be aware of this. The response to this by the non-expert may be political, in that interpretations will be supported

or challenged as self-interest dictates. However, challenge may be difficult and therefore specialist status may be seen as powerful and hence valued. This may set in train attempts to acquire specialist status for oneself and deny it to others, by the manipulation of ambiguity, through challenging the interpretations of others while protecting one's own from scrutiny. It is suggested that the structuring of time can be useful to such political interactions, and may play a role in the provision of political opportunity and the development of political skills. The absence of challenge to interpretations of phenomena, whether the interpretations of experts or others, may result from the motivation of the individual. It may also be the result of cultural pressures or other barriers to social interaction and information exchange, but whatever its cause, non-action as a response to ambiguity, so that alternative interpretations remain dormant, provides freedom for some individuals to act as they wish, and is therefore to their political advantage. For similar reasons and with similar effect, individuals may fail to challenge their own models of reality.

There may be a group response to the presence of ambiguity in the organisation in that norms develop over interpretations to be placed on phenomena. However, this attempt to reduce ambiguity may be upset by powerful group members who may be able to flout the norms. As abstractions, norms are in any case ambiguous, and one response to their existence may be to use them to one's own advantage. Norms about legitimacy can have a politically useful role in this way, in providing post-hoc justifications of, or challenges to, the actions

of organisational participants. The effect of informal bases of legitimacy as counterweights to formal ones may lead to a misinterpretation of which basis of judgement will prevail, and hence to action with is deemed illegitimate. It is, however, possible to disregard the perceptions of legitimacy of the relatively powerless, and group norms which support particular interpretations of phenomena or particular values about who should have most power may facilitate this action. Legitimization is, however, not static, but subject to change as people reinterpret their context and as political pressures undermine prevailing values.

Testing reality by trying to find the "correct" interpretation of organisational phenomena is problematic. Taking action on the basis of one interpretation as a test still requires interpretation of the outcome. Interpretation of the outcome, or a past event, is not a neutral activity but may be politically guided. Predictions of the future, which might be part of such a test, may in themselves alter a power structure, and therefore prediction too may be political in intent. A major difficulty in this respect is that interpretations are influenced both by conceptual models, which may be inappropriate and not take sufficient account of ambiguity, and by self-interest, whether pragmatic or psychological. The discussion in this section of the responses people make to ambiguity in organisational phenomena reflect on the existing literature about power as reviewed in Chapter 2 in a number of ways.

As far as the A-B model of power is concerned (see Chapter 2, section 2) it suggests that the interaction of A and B is the outcome of

perception, interpretation and decision about meaning by the two parties concerned, and that they might respond to the difficulties of interpretation caused by ambiguity by making political use of it. Ambiguity may therefore be seen as a political opportunity to A and B, but also as providing a possible danger in the form of challenge to their preferred interpretations. It can be suggested that trying to get the other person to interpret phenomena in a way in which suits your interest is the important factor as far as the political relationship is concerned, and may include not only such issues as whether a particular action is legitimate or not, or whether coercion is being used, but also whether B has in fact complied with the demands of A. The subjective nature of the judgements which A and B make about each others' behaviour, therefore, go beyond the assessment of sanctions suggested by Bacharach and Lawler (1980) but applies to all aspects of the political interaction. However, it is perhaps useful to remember here that ambiguity is not entirely subjective, not "all in the mind", but is also a characteristic of the phenomena which have to be interpreted. The suggestion that people may avoid challenging each other's interpretations or their own models or reality for reasons to do with their commitment to the organisation supports the view put forward in Chapter 2, section 2 that motivation is an important factor in political interaction.

It has been suggested in Chapter 2, section 3, that the structuring of the organisation leads to divergence of values and facilitates conflict. It can be added that among the norms which develop in

different groups may be norms about meanings of events or concepts, and the existence of conflict (or the absense of it). Norms may develop over the determination of the legitimacy or otherwise of people's actions, as discussed in Chapter 2, section 4, but it is suggested that both formal and informal bases of legitimacy may operate together in a given situation, creating difficulties for the organisation member who must respond to this ambiguity and may misjudge the relative strength of these bases. This also relates to the problem discussed in Chapter 2, section 5 of judging whether rules exist and really apply, and where the line is drawn between acceptable and unacceptable action. Justifying one's action in these circumstances may be a matter of persuading others to accept a particular interpretation of phenomena.

5. Organisational ambiguity and organisation politics

In this section I shall draw together threads of the argument presented elsewhere in this chapter to show how ambiguity and political behaviour in the organisation are related.

It has been suggested that organisational phenomena, being for the most part abstractions, are ambiguous, both as to facts and values, whether or not this ambiguity is perceived by organisational members. Various types of ambiguity to be found in organisations have been identified.

Information about organisational phenomena comes to the individual largely through the behaviour of others, including the written or

spoken word, actions and incidents which the individual observes. Others behave 'as if' phenomena exist, or apply such energy to dealing with some phenomena as to suggest their value. Decisions have to be made by the individual about how such information is to be interpreted, and since this interpretation is likely to favour the interests of some people more than others, such decisions have political implications. Getting agreement to a particular interpretation which favours one's own interest is both a measure of power and a means of crystallising a power structure.

Information is filtered through the characteristics of the organisation. The structure of the organisation may allow information to be exclusively held by some individuals, as may the existence in the organisation of people with specialist skills and knowledge. The culture of the organisation, including the degree of competitiveness and secrecy in the culture, idiomatic use of language and degree of consensus about meanings, and norms of interpretation found in particular groups or in the organisation as a whole, will also act as a filter through which the individual receives information about organisational phenomena. The structure and culture are not passive objects but the outcome of interaction between people, and it can be suggested that this interaction is political, in that those concerned are pursuing their own interests, whether pragmatic or psychological, as they perceive them. The structure and culture are therefore political creations of organisation members.(1)

The problem of interpreting the behaviour of others in the organisation can be increased by the opportunity which abstractions provide for

individuals to dissemble as to the roles they are playing or interests they are pursuing. This can be seen as representing an attempt to guide the interpretation which the observer will make and so influence his or her response in ways which are helpful to the actor.[2]

Ambiguity in organisational phenomena may be seen as a threat to decision-makers (i.e. those who have relatively more power) and they may attempt to reduce it by withholding information so that challenge to their interpretations can be avoided. This has the effect of conferring or increasing power for those who can gain such information. Challenges to interpretation can undermine the legitimacy of actions of decision-makers, as can changes in the values which underpin the norms which legitimize their actions.[3]

Attempts to reduce ambiguity through the use of bureaucratic structures and procedures may fail, through the technical difficulty of specifying the behavour of individuals who deal largely with abstractions, and the political difficulty of controlling what response people make to the existence of bureaucracy.[4] It can be suggested that people will support or undermine it as it helps or hinders their interests, and will use it as a political opportunity. In this way bureaucracy may simply substitute new ambiguities for old ones.

It can be suggested that the action which the individual takes on the basis of the interpretation placed on information he or she receives

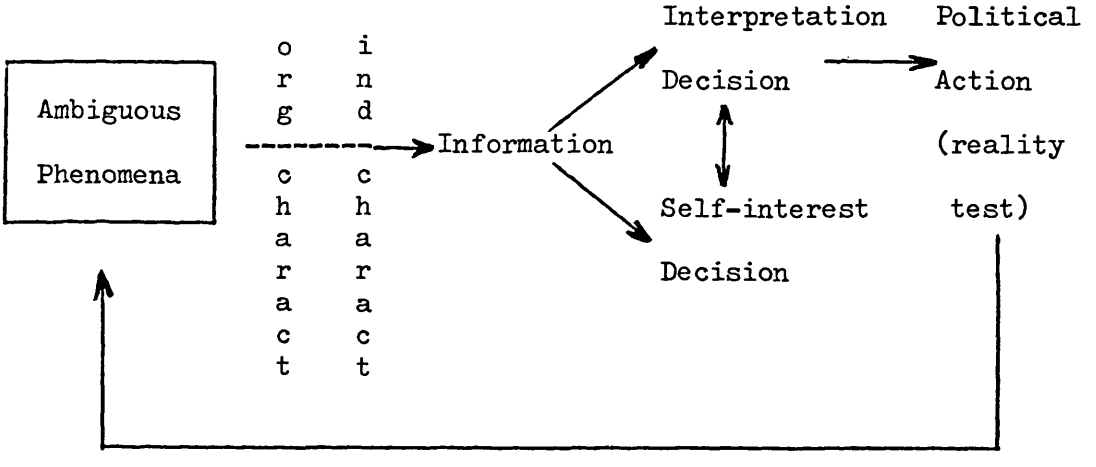
about organisational phenomena is a means of testing reality, by testing the validity of the interpretation. However, it is a doubtful test and subject to political pressures, both in prediction and in the interpretation of the past. The information which comes to the individuals is not only filtered through organisational characteristics, such as culture and structure, and including the structuring of time, but also through such characteristics of the individual as cognitive skills and constructs and psychological needs. It will be affected by the individual's willingness to seek information and perception of the political value of doing so, and hence also by attitudes towards political behaviour.(5) The action (or non-action) can be seen therefore as dependent on the motivation, values and context of the individual.

The action which the individual takes becomes part of the ambiguous organisational phenomena which others in turn must interpret. The choice of action will be guided by the perceived self-interest of the individual, including conformity to his or her personal values - the perceived legitimacy of the action and power to act in that way, and the perceived pattern of cause and effect based on past experience. The action may involve bringing to light or suppressing ambiguity and it can be suggested that ambiguity may be used by organisation members as a resource in the political process.

The relationship between organisational phenomena, information, interpretation and political action can be shown in diagram form as in Figure 8. It might be argued that "organisational characteristics" and "individual characteristics" shown in this diagram are in fact

part of the ambiguous phenomena of the organisation. Although this is true, I think it is necessary also to show them separately because they are not just phenomena to be interpreted but also have a considerable effect on the interpretation. The model suggests how the individual interacts politically with ambiguous organisational phenomena, whether or not the phenomena are perceived to be ambiguous by the individual, and whether or not he or she would attach the term "political" to the action.

Figure 8



Notes

1. Evidence of the political importance of structures and cultures (including the values of individuals and norms of groups) will be found in Chapter 3, principally sections 2 and 4, and in Chapter 2, section 4.

2. Problems of interpretation are discussed in Chapter 2, section 4 (values about political behaviour) and section 6. See also Chapter 3, sections 2(d), 3(d) and 4(f).

3. See the discussion on the political uses of information in Chapter 3, section 4(f) and the Conclusions to the Chapter. See also the discussion of the role of the expert in Chapter 3, section 3(d).

4. It could be said that both the Research Fund and the Equipment Fund decision-making processes, but particularly the former, were bureaucratic attempts to reduce ambiguity which provided organisation members with political opportunities.

5. For a variety of views on the importance of interaction with others and willingness to seek information, see Chapter 3, section 2(c) on the formation of groups.

CONCLUSIONS

The objectives of this research were to investigate and throw some light on the political perceptions of organisation members, and on the consequences of those perceptions for people's behaviour in the organisation. It has been shown in Chapter 2 that the literature on power is wide-ranging and contains considerable areas of disagreement, and this research suggests that, like these authors, organisation members do not all share the same concepts of power. A tidy match between this research and the existing literature is not therefore to be expected, but the conclusion to Chapter 3 of this thesis suggests that a link can be made between the two, by considering what political opportunities the research setting offered to participants, seen in the light of their own perceptions of that setting. It was further suggested that a major theme to emerge from the research was the ambiguity of organisational phenomena, which enabled different people to see the same phenomena in different ways, or some people to perceive phenomena which others deny exist.

Chapter 4 took up this theme of ambiguity, which has been given little attention in the literature about power, and which, when it has been used elsewhere in the social science literature, has remained largely unexplored. The analysis of ambiguity in Chapter 4 suggests that different types of ambiguity can be identified; that it arises in the organisation in a number of ways; and that it represents political opportunity for organisation members, whether or not they recognise and make deliberate use of it.

Some ideas which emerge from this study seem to me of particular

interest. First of all, the very fact that people in an organisation can have such differing interpretations of their organisational context and attach differing meanings to events. This seems to be related to the conceptual models they use in making their interpretation, and especially to the criteria they adopt for identifying and making judgements about phenomena. These differences apply not only to the immediate interaction with others in which they attempt to pursue their own interests, but also to the wider organisational context they perceive. These differences and the processes of interpretation are of importance to political behaviour, since it seems reasonable to assume that people's perceptions guide the actions they take in trying to influence events.

Interpreting other people's behaviour, identifying what causes or might cause a person to act in a particular way, has been shown to be problematic, and in the light of this it is curious that people decide on their interpretations and act on them with such certainty. Perhaps what they are doing is adopting pragmatic rules which, as long as they appear to work well enough, enable them to make assumptions which need not be questioned. I say "appear to" because provided that phenomena are ambiguous, it may be possible to interpret outcomes to match one's preferred ways of thinking and acting, rather than changing conceptual models; reality is not easily tested.

It may also be that,where ambiguities are of particular kinds, for instance, cumulative or expressive, differences of perceptions may

well escape notice and it may be difficult to detect what, if any, impact they have on outcomes.

Another interesting point to emerge from this study is the way in which meanings of organisational phenomena shift - one can suggest for political reasons. An organisational event may ostensibly have one character (say a competition for resources) but be interpreted in a different way (perhaps a public relations exercise) by some people involved in it. In other words, the development and use of expressive ambiguities in the organisation, with particular reference to their political value, is an interesting theme which this research has suggested.

It seems clear from this study that the culture of the organisation can considerably influence the amount and kinds of information people can have and therefore has an effect on the interpretations they make of phenomena. Alternative readings may be screened out by this means, either because people with different views are kept structurally apart, or because particular readings become the norm. The ambiguities of phenomena may not therefore come to conscious attention within the organisation. The symbolic interactionist idea that meanings are "negotiated" is perhaps therefore a misnomer, since it suggests that differences of interpretation are noticed and confronted, but this appears not to be always the case. Culture therefore has a political impact in that certain interpretations are submerged, and I take this to be a means by which the values of the powerful are sustained within the organisation. Avoiding challenge may be an important political skill in this respect.

On the other side of this coin, however, is the way in which cultural characteristics may become political opportunities. Formal and informal rules may be used to compliment or counteract each other, thus providing an opportunity for challenge or support to the legitimacy of actions, and flouting the norms of behaviour may be a successful political tactic. It is not just substantive information which is important therefore in acting politically, but one needs also information about what other people's perceptions and values are, what norms prevail, or whether formal or informal rules are strongest, in order to understand how other people may act, and therefore, how they may be influenced.

Several directions for further enquiry can be suggested from this research, most of which derive from the identification and discussion of ambiguity as an important element in organisational life, and therefore in political behaviour. These suggestions can be briefly outlined as follows:-

1. Ambiguity having been identified as a factor of political importance, and some suggestions made about how it can be analysed and what part it may play in organisational politics, some further exploration specifically directed towards the relationship between ambiguity, perception and political action seems called for. A study of how the particular cognitive models used by participants in a particular context relate to their political activities would be one way of tackling this question. It would need to include perceptions of cause and effect relationships in interactions with others and perceptions

of the context of such interactions, and to show what role ambiguity plays in both perception and action.

2. It would be interesting to know whether different types of organisation produce different levels of or types of ambiguity. Has ambiguity emerged as a key theme here because of special characteristics of the organisation chosen for this research? If it is less in evidence in other kinds of organisation, does this mean that ambiguity does not exist there or is just more suppressed? If so, how and why has this come about?

3. If ambiguity can be classified into different types as I have suggested - cumulative, disjunctive, expressive, projective and temporal - one can look for uses of this classification in organisational research. One application, for example, might be in the analysis of conflict. It might be found that different types of ambiguity would be more likely to lead to conflict and make conflict more difficult to resolve. Differing strategies for dealing with conflicts might be suggested where different types of ambiguity were involved. It would seem reasonable to assume that disjunctive ambiguities make conflict more difficult to resolve than cumulative ones, where a consensus would be a possibility. Where ambiguities are based largely on projection, a resolution of conflict might be achieved by providing information which disconfirms the projection.

Expressive ambiguities are a particularly interesting case looked at in the context of conflict situations. It could be

suggested that identification of symbolic meanings would be a necessary step in preventing or resolving conflict, but how are they to be identified? It can be suggested that the role of expressive ambiguities, how identified and how reconciled in conflict situations, would be worth further investigation.

Conflicts have a time dimension, since protagonists reflect on past events and consider future possibilities, and this research has suggested that temporal ambiguities are political opportunities. This raises the question of how differing interpretations of past and future may result in conflict, and how such interpretations may be used by protagonists in support of their causes.

4. There is a need to look at the interface between theory about organisational politics and motivation theory. I am not primarily thinking here of the identification of a "need for power" as an aspect of the individual's motivation, but of the way in which motivation theory is applied in management education and training. In that context, motivation theory is often oriented towards the commitment of the employee to the work organisation. One can ask to what extent this is, in effect, a question of how a manager can gain the cooperation of subordinates, or, in other words, A trying to get B to do something. Since motivation theory has been around for a long time in management training, it would be interesting to know how it is perceived by managers. Is it a guide to the successful pursuit of self-interest? A political strategy? The picture

is somewhat complicated by the fact that "apathy" or lack of commitment in others can be politically useful to one's cause, as Dearlove (1973) has noted and has been shown in this present research. For example, it can be helpful to oligarchs if organisation members do not demand a say in decision-making.

The notion of the resistance of B to the influence attempts of A would also appear to have some connection with motivation theory. In this study it was seen that the attempt to align organisational activities with the demands of the environment may founder, if the rewards used by the powerful to bring about this alignment are not seen as rewards by organisation members. This suggests that "strategic contingency" theories of power need to take motivation theory into account.

It would appear that at a number of points, theories about power and theories about motivation could be linked, and that the connections between the two could be profitably researched.

5. A fifth area of investigation suggested by this research relates to what Kris and Kaplan (1952) have called "standards of interpretation". This is a question which is of relevance to organisation members pursuing their self-interests and to organisational researchers alike. Kris and Kaplan were concerned with literary criticism - whether one can "read the wrong poem" - but the question can also be put to interpretation in the organisation. If organisational phenomena are ambiguous as I have suggested, is there a limit to the interpretations that may

be placed on them, or is any interpretation equally valid with any other?

Sheila Dawson (1965), recalling how a Bomber Pilot made an idiosyncratic interpretation of a passage from Macbeth, ("... the deep damnation of his taking off..." etc) comments that had the Pilot been aware that the passage was written by Shakespeare his interpretation would have been different. This suggests that, given crucial information, there may be limits to justifiable interpretation, since, in the passage in question, whatever else Shakespeare might have meant, it could not have been anything to do with aircraft. This raises the question of whether in interpretation of organisational phenomena there might also be found limits to justifiable interpretation. When Phillips (1973) in discussing research methodology suggests that, rather than attempting to prove facts, we should be attempting to show how particular circumstances would entitle you to draw particular conclusions, he is begging the question of how you determine such "entitlement". One could say that a highly projected ambiguity, for example, is not an interpretation to which one is entitled; it is like the Bomber Pilot's reading of Macbeth. But is it possible to develop some guidelines for defining the limits on interpretation of organisational phenomena? This question would involve finding the boundary between the interpretations limited by consensus - a normative pressure to see phenomena in a particular light which suppresses ambiguity - and interpretations which must be

ruled out as unjustifiable. In the present study it was suggested that there were some instances where one could say that a respondent's views were mistaken, and perhaps a line of enquiry might be into the discovery of genuine errors of perception, how and why they arise, as a step towards finding guidelines for interpretation. The difficulty of identifying standards of interpretation should not be underestimated however. One has only to consider the ways in which individuals and groups may ostensibly discuss one topic while symbolically discussing another, that is, the presence of expressive ambiguities in the organisation, to appreciate the problem. Nevertheless, such a study could have considerable value for the development of qualitative research methods, and contribute to our understanding of organisational behaviour.

6. This question of justifiable interpretation leads on to questions about effective political behaviour. In the present study two main views about how to pursue one's interests successfully were identified - the oblique or "gently, gently" approach, and the "nasty" or high profile behaviour. These represent two different interpretations of the cause and effect in political behaviour in the organisation studied, and the question of which was best remained unresolved. This suggests that it might be possible to identify and classify a number of such alternative interpretations in an organisational setting, including ones which are perceived by participants and those which are overlooked or rejected. Some criteria might

then be developed for determining which interpretation would be most conducive to effective political behaviour in a particular context, and a comparison between different types of context could be made. In the light of the present research, analysis of this context would need to include values and structures and their ambiguities, and give consideration to the ways in which interpretation of the context has consequences for the effectiveness of political behaviour. Identification of an effective style of political behaviour does not, of course, mean that individuals will necessarily adopt it, and the relationship between perceptions and actions in political behaviour could be further explored.

This research has suggested that when the perceptions of organisational participants are made the focus of attention, the importance of ambiguity as a characteristic of their context is revealed. An attempt has been made to explore this concept of ambiguity and its political implications, and further lines of enquiry have been identified. It can be concluded that where ambiguity in organisational phenomena is found, its political implications deserve consideration, and where political behaviour is identified, attention should be paid to the role of ambiguity in political opportunity.

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